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The CLIMBING COURVATELS



EDWARD W
TOWNSEND

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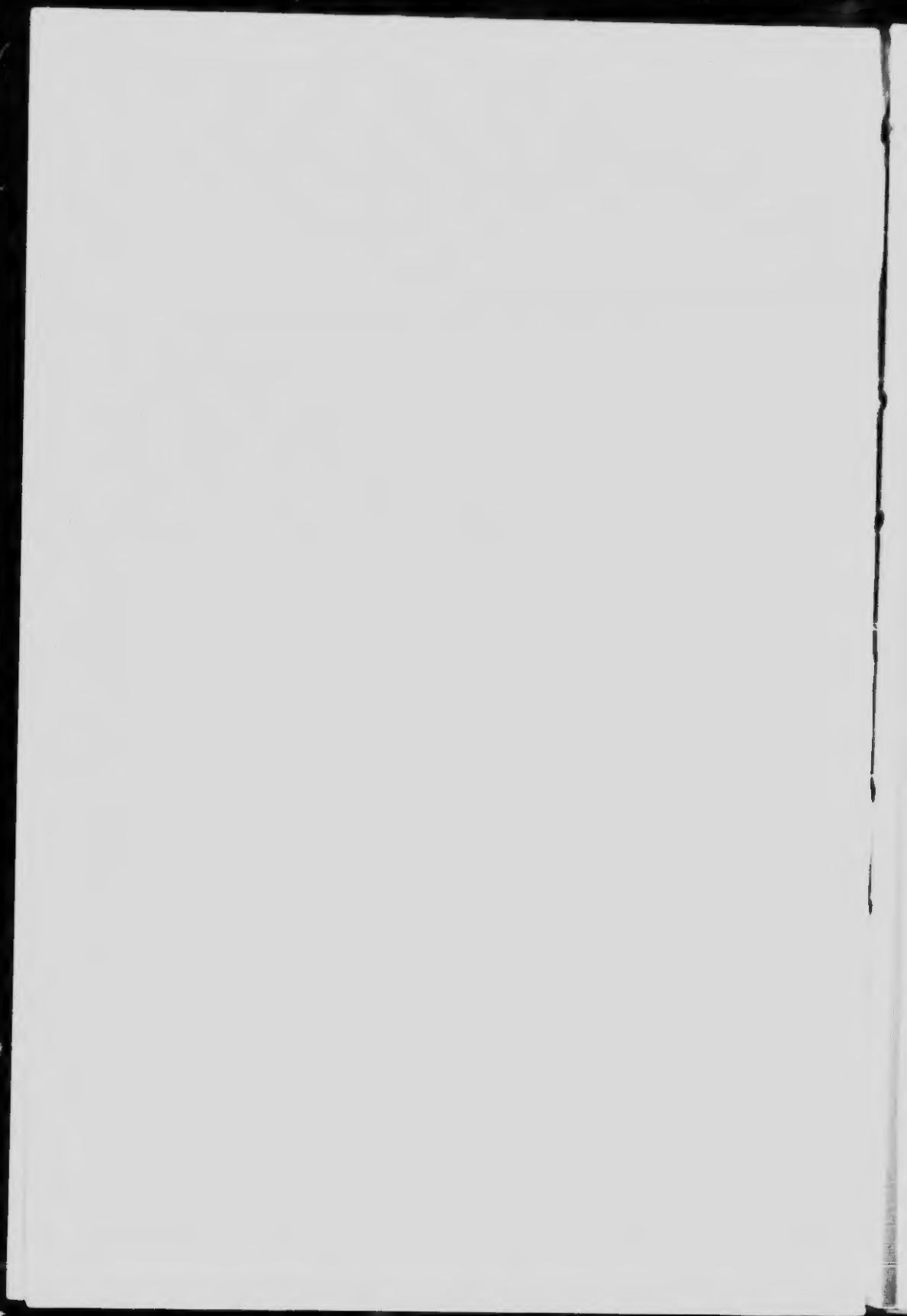
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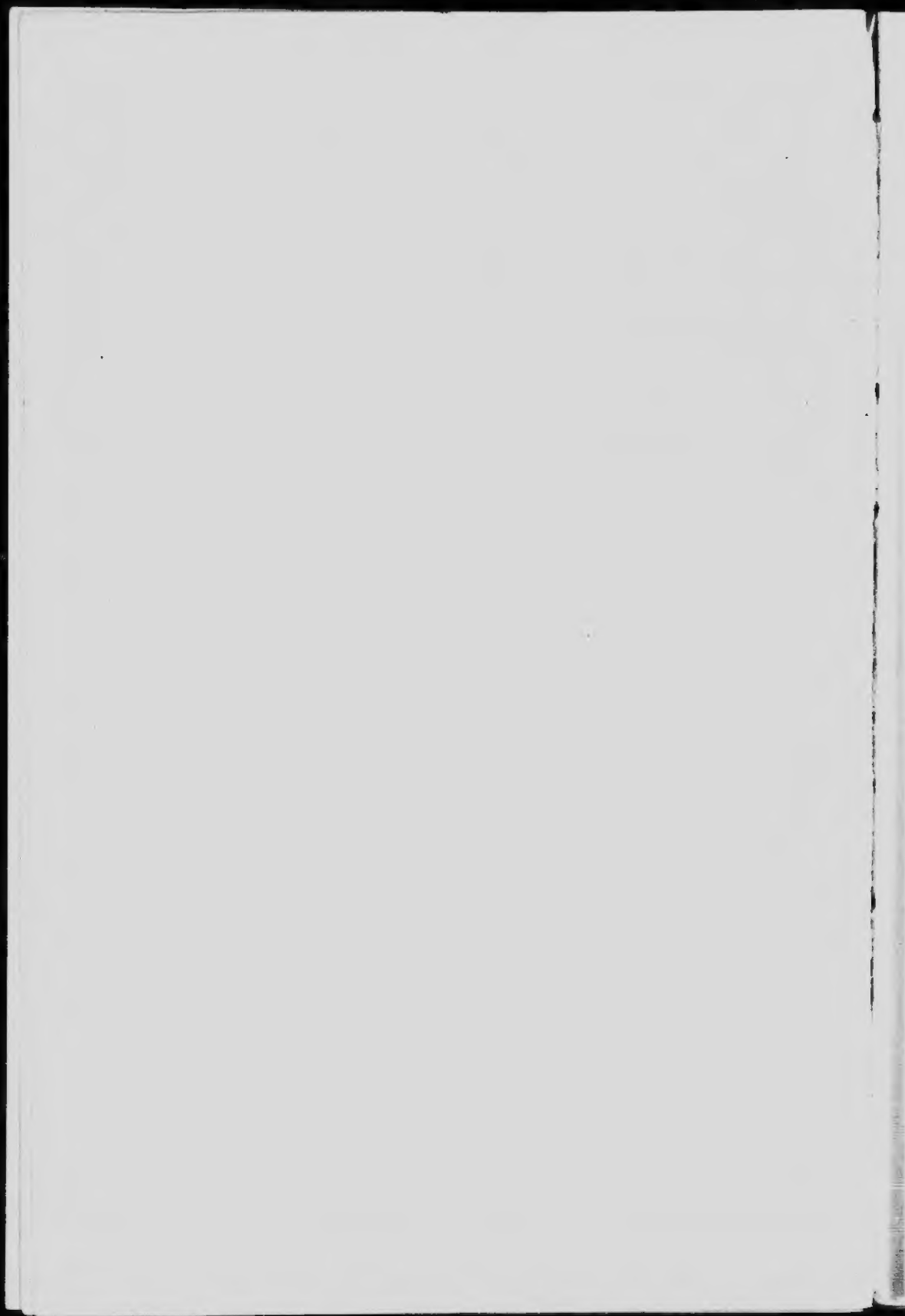
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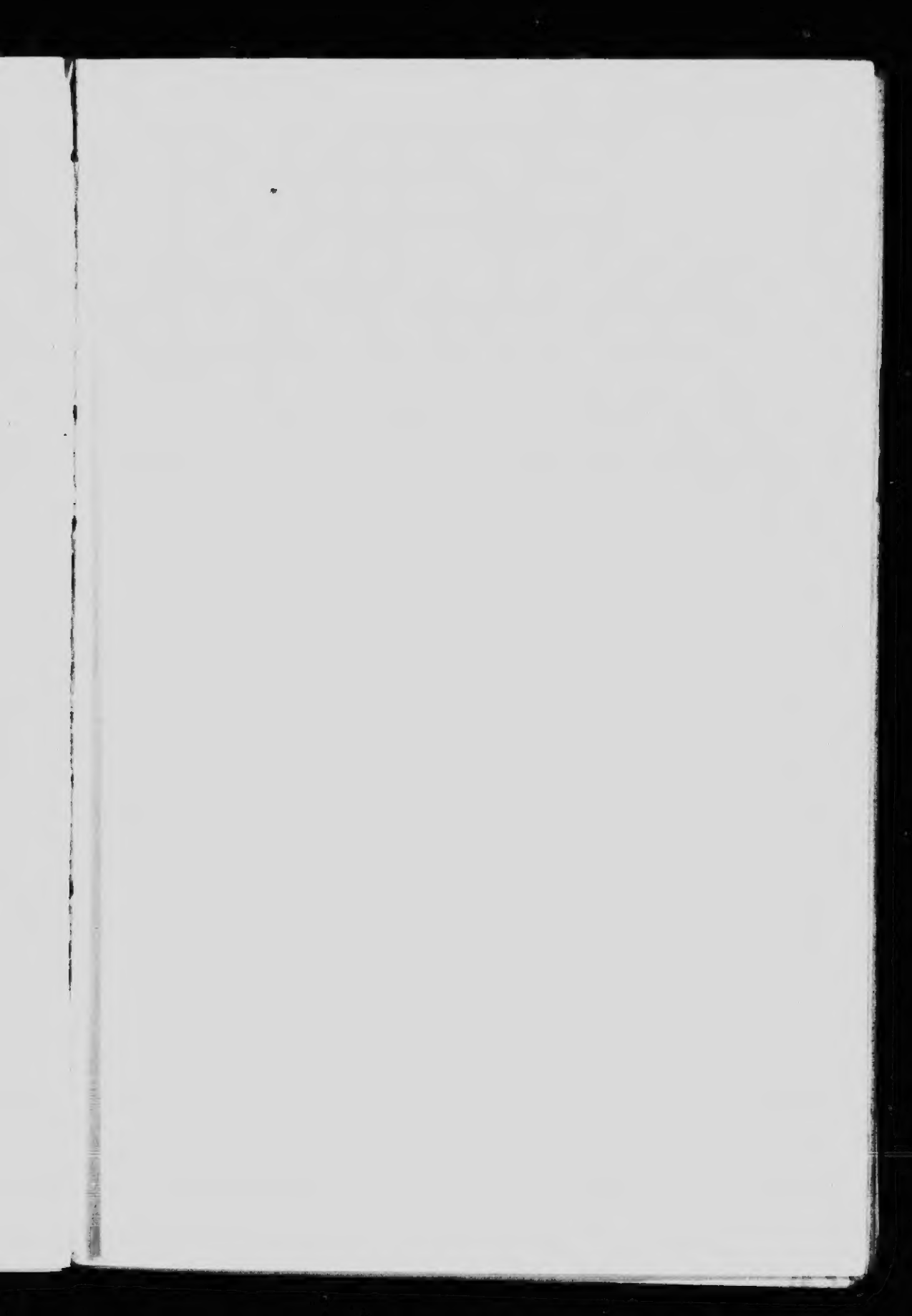






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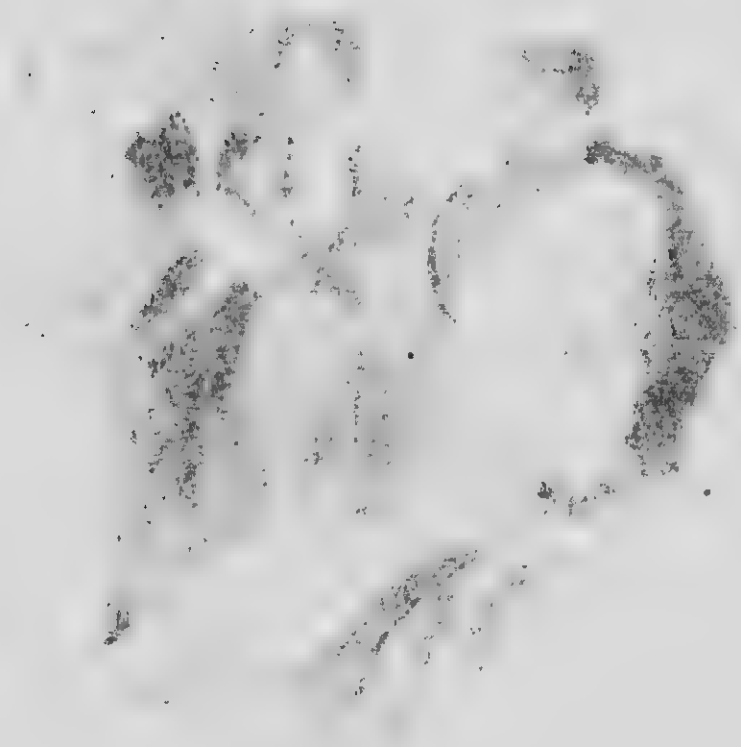
"MRS. HALL APPROACHED SLOWLY TOWING THE ICEBERGS."

—Page 43.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME





THE CLIMBING COURVATELS

BY

EDWARD W. TOWNSEND

*Author of "Chimmie Fadden," "Days Like These,"
"Less and Leaven," etc.*

With Eight Full-page Illustrations in Colour by
J. V. McFALL



THIRD EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time a small party of American friends went from Paris, by Seine boat and by bicycle, to a charmingly absurd little resort on the banks of the river Marne, where they had lunch on the lawn, between the river and the old brick inn. There came to them an itinerant sleight-of-hand performer with offer of entertainment, but one there was among the Americans so much more skillful than the professional in legerdemain that he who came to amaze remained in amazement. However, the professional did entertain: he told tales of many who followed his calling, of some who had once followed it but now were admired members of sedate society.

What one of the party heard that day became the theme of this novel, into the plot of

INTRODUCTION

which have been woven further adventures and scenes suggested by the tales told that day on the lawn, to

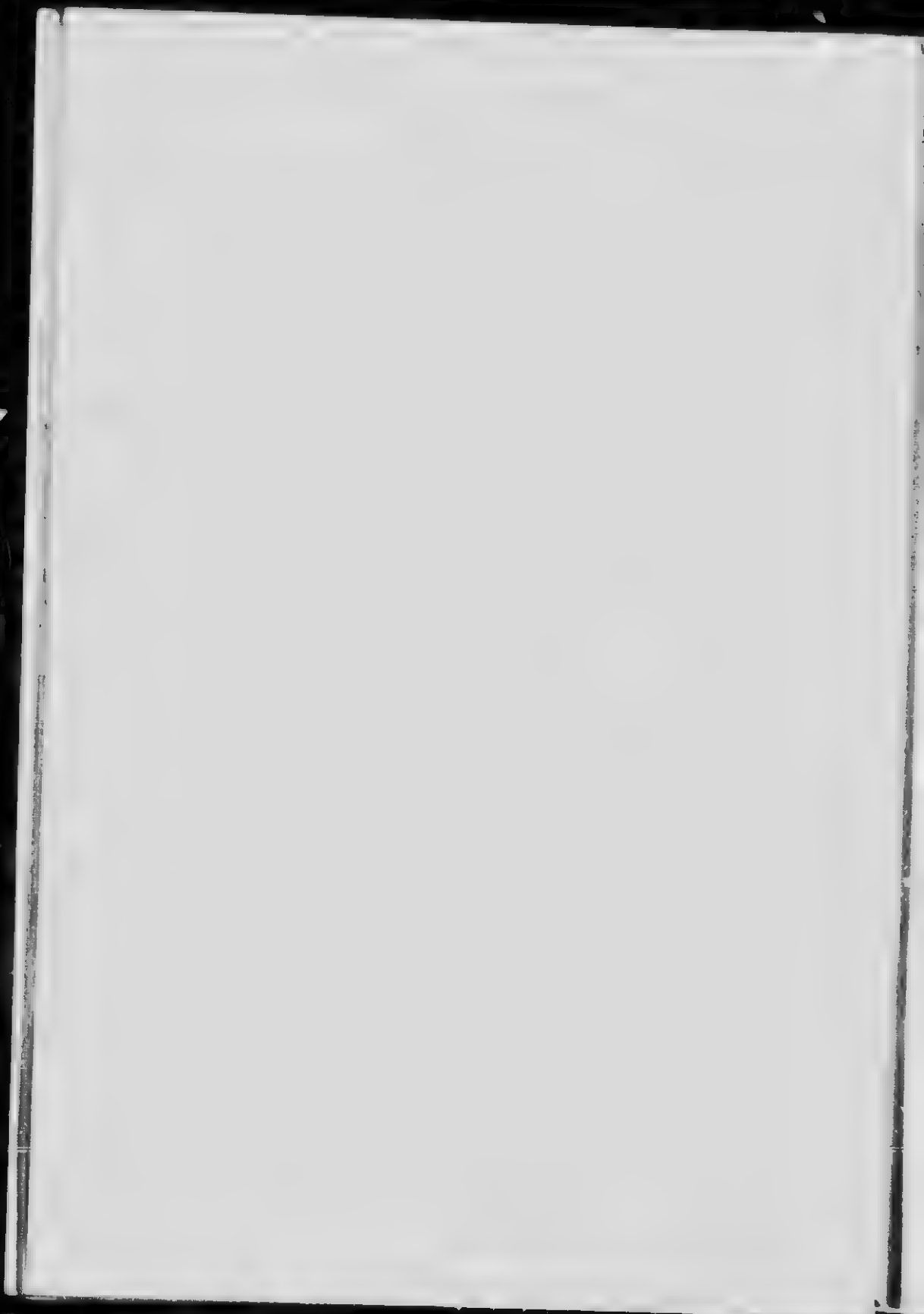
THE AUTHOR.

MONTCLAIR, N. J., 1909.

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THE CLIMBING COURVATELS



The Climbing Courvatels

CHAPTER I

RICHARD COURTNEY was a good-looking fellow: anything like craftiness which may have shown in his eyes in the days of harder, less settled life was now banished and in its place was the keen glance of a sleight-of-hand-master, and his pleasant smile was that of one who, having conquered a predisposition to waywardness, had developed into a distinguished member of a respectable profession."

His present biographer wrote that of Dick soon after his redemption by his admirable wife, Betty, to paths of righteousness, or, as he described those paths, straight ways. The Courtneys were then known wherever the difficult and pleasing art of prestidigitation is practiced, as "Monsieur and Madame Courvatel, the Wizard Wonders of the Magic East."

All the success they deserved had not come

to them at once; there was a year or more of almost gipsy-like wandering through western Europe after they had brought back with them from the East much of their wonder work; but then their merits had been discovered by an American manager, distractedly searching for show novelties, and their rise was rapid. All the more rapid, no doubt, because Richard was as winning and merry in his manner as he was expert in his profession, and because Betty, his assistant in wizard work, was as jolly as she was good looking, and as sympathy-compelling as she was tricky. Their professional engagements soon extended to fifty-two weeks in the year and at rapidly mounting salaries, until the whole world knew the wonderful Courvatels—but no one knew Mr. and Mrs. Richard Courtney.

This separation of their professional and private lives, carried to an extreme through Betty's devices, was doubtless part of a plan she had worked out but which she did not then disclose to Dick, and he never questioned.

What Betty did was always right to him because she did it.

With each new degree of prosperity Betty became ever more and more severe in her economies until, had she not been his first and last and only article of faith, Richard might, in this respect, have protested. There was something Oriental in his love of luxury, but something more than Puritanical in her suppression of such or any other expensive taste.

"Wait, Dicky," she would urge, if she discovered any signs of chafing under the yoke of her economies. "We are young and we can wait. Look at the people around us. None of them are drawing down from the box office our weekly wad, to be sure, but many of them have been earning good money longer than we have lived, and where is it now? Why, those people form an endless borrowing and lending chain, and that sort of thing isn't for us. We've been there. Wait!"

Her reference to where they had been finan-

cially would generally quiet Dick's protests, but if she saw a lingering look which suggested that there might, without financial disaster, be a slight relaxation of her severe economies she would say to him between the afternoon and evening performances, when they played in New York, "Come along with me."

They would stroll down Broadway to the uptown branch of "their" bank, and furtively pass their hands over the polished granite columns guarding its closed doors like watchful sentinels. That was what Betty called doing their "private magic," and it never failed to have its intended effect upon her emotional husband.

Betty, who kept their joint bank account and made their investments, had selected "her" bank not so much for the beauty and solidity of those polished columns as for the impressive solidity of the bank president's position in a certain social set. About that she knew an amount and degree of particulars which would have puzzled Bank President Hall, had

he been aware of the extent and kind of her information. A woman may have reasons for doing business in one bank rather than another which a man would never dream of.

"He is in the right set, Dick," she would say to her wondering and admiring husband when showing him the entries she made as to the Halls' social place and activities. "It is the kind of set anyone who wants to snuggle up to the real social push ought to make a play for. Nothing brass band about those people, but the quiet and fixed kind—head-liners, all, but no press agent to keep the fact before the public."

"Good work," commented Dick, satisfied if not quite understanding. "If ever we get out of our present galley that is the kind of a craft to take passage in, eh?"

"Surest thing you know," assented Betty.

A few years before this chapter of their lives began, the opportunity came toward which all of Betty's economies, all her hiding from the world of their private identity had

tended. Monsieur and Madame Courvatel disappeared from the stage and the sight and knowledge of their admiring world-wide public, and the title to a desirable Harlem theatre passed to the president of their bank, held in trust by him for two of the bank's esteemed clients, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Courtney. The same Courtneys had already become favorably known as clever operators in the real estate market. Although Betty's savings had been large, much of it was tied up in her shrewd real estate deals, so money had to be borrowed to complete the theatre purchase. Betty knew when it was wise to go into debt.

During the time of her saving and investments Betty had gained a point dear to her heart; she had been permitted to consult and transact business with no less a person than President Hall. At first he had been amused by the shrewdness of the persistent and handsome woman who would see no one else but the president of the bank when her business became of importance, but he had come to have

a serious respect for the affairs about which she advised with him. She was always strictly and briskly business-like in her interviews. Also her account was profitable.

This was the state of their relation when the theatre purchase was under way, and when Banker Hall's health kept him at his country place, not quite ill, but not well enough to go to the bank. The final settlement of the purchase was to be made, and Betty wrote a polite note to the banker asking if it would be agreeable to him to have her and her husband call at his home to consult about a point in the business she did not wish to close without his advice. An equally polite note invited the Courtneys to call.

To say that Betty was in any sense dazed with the prospect as she and Dick rode up from the station in Banker Hall's automobile would be to suggest that she was the least possible bit frightened, and she was not. However, she was thrilled with excitement, much of which Dick felt through the peculiarly sym-

pathetic physical and mental relation which existed between them, but only a little of which he understood. Betty, in truth, had not thought it expedient to reveal to her husband the full scope of her ambitions and plans; he knew that she had some campaign in hand by which she meant to better their social position, and he as good as knew that she would succeed, for she was not one to undertake a rainbow hunt. So, alert and good natured, he sat by her side as they whirled over the beautiful country road, pleased that she was agreeably excited, ready to help in any way he might be called upon for help, and aware that in this regard it was best for Betty to lay out the work and for him to do whatever he received a cue to do.

"It's a corking set," he said, waving his hand to include the whole sweep of landscape where man with good taste had done much to aid nature.

She only squeezed his arm by way of reply, and he smiled at this silent evidence of her elation, and said, "You're rehearsing a swell

new part, eh? Well, if I can help by feeding you with a line or two, I'll be little Dicky on the spot."

There was a turn in from the country road, a sweep of private driveway, and the car brought up before a veranda scatteringly occupied with a company of men and women whom Betty and Dick studied with swift glances, wonderfully close and comprehending—and instantly, in some small ways, mysterious almost in their sudden assumption, became like those they studied. This, as a servant, helping Betty from the car was saying, "Mr. Hall is at the end of the veranda, if you please, Mrs. Courtney."

Betty, whose mind was working in flashes, asked herself why Mrs. Hall was not at the steps to receive her. It would have been that way in a play. Then she considered that they were there on business, and if the banker had not chanced to be on the veranda they might have been received at a different door, even, and been denied this chance to make an en-

trance where so many guests were. "Why were the guests there? Where was Mrs. Hall? Was her own hat on straight? Was there any dust of travel smudging her face?"

She glanced at her husband and saw that he looked as if he had just stepped from his dressing-room, and knew that she must have preserved her own freshness as well as had Dick. This all passed through her mind as the servant led them to the end of the veranda where the invalid banker sat in an easy chair, and who welcomed them cordially, asking them to pardon him for not receiving them in his library where they could discuss affairs better, perhaps. He added, as if explaining the presence of the many callers, that word had passed about the colony that he had been ordered to sail for Europe and a number of friends had called to say good-bye—it was a simple, family-like colony they lived in, he said, so he had come out on the veranda to see them.

He made his garrulous explanation with a

kindly purpose. He saw that the newcomers were laboring under some degree of excitement, and he was giving them a breathing moment. Also he was giving the other visitors an opportunity to draw away, as they were quietly doing, when it was seen that the new visitors evidently had business to discuss with the banker. Betty noted all this, noted in the others on the veranda an interest in her and Dick, and she thanked her good fortune that she had not spared time, money or thought in the selection of her toilet.

Mr. Hall gravely listened to some details of the business the Courtneys had to discuss, considered what they had to say as to some changes in the terms of the purchase, gave his advice, and promised to notify the bank of some point and then signalled to a woman Betty now saw for the first time, and who had been in the house when they arrived. It was the banker's wife who now approached with that wifely elevation of the brows which plainly asked for her instructions as to these new people.

To her Mr. Hall introduced his "friends," and Betty caught the word with a shock of triumph. She almost knew what words would follow, and as the banker spoke them, simple, pleasant words enough, but laden with a significance for Betty which it would have been impossible for any there to understand: "There will be no desirable train into town until three o'clock," the banker was saying to his wife; "Can't you induce Mr. and Mrs. Courtney to take lunch with us?"

Betty felt herself stiffening with increased excitement, and saw the color in Dick's face deepen. Here was the first act of the dream of a fairy play come true into their lives! Lunch at the table of people of great and acknowledged social grandeur!

Dick was looking to Betty for his cue; a thing that was easy for her to give unknown to any but him. She could inform him before an audience, without an auditor suspecting, that what she held in her hand was an old-fashioned open-faced gold watch with the let-



"BETTY FELT HERSELF STIFFENING WITH INCREASED EXCITEMENT."—Page 12.



ters "X, Y, Z," engraved on it, or whatever.

In her most sympathy-compelling tone she accepted Mrs. Hall's invitation to lunch, with a pretty reserve as to turning their business visit into a social one; and her murmured words contained a cipher which told Dick not to add a word but to look flattered. Dick obeyed.

Mrs. Hall returned to her other guests, some of whom were to remain to lunch, some of whom were departing. It was all quite informal, the quiet talk among the guests, the good-byes and wishes for Mr. Hall's speedy recovery of entire health.

As all those who were leaving came up to bid good-bye to Mr. Hall, Betty signalled to Dick that it seemed time for them to move away from the invalid, and they strolled a little about the nearer grounds, and met others strolling, some of whom, to Betty's surprise, spoke to them as if they were old acquaintances. It was not exciting or important talk; a question about this or that new plant or

flower, a word about the improvements of the road, the beauty of the weather. Betty soon divined that this casual talk had a meaning, too; it was the recognition by the others that the strange guests were to be made to feel welcome by the other guests as well as by the hostess; it was the small but to Betty tremendously important recognition of the fact that for the moment, at least, she and Dick were equals among the elect of the earth!

Betty inwardly glowed, and what Dick saw reflected in her eyes made him so serenely happy that it was no wonder some of the others spoke among themselves of the beauty of the strange couple who, whatever they might be, were of such importance financially as to be granted an interview at his home by the invalid banker.

"Lunch is served," said a man coming to the veranda and speaking to Mrs. Hall. Betty smiled as she glanced at her husband. She saw him making ready for an entrance, a little gathering of himself, a preparation of the

muscles of the body and face, a general preparedness, no one but stage folk know of, and she smiled again after she had noted in Dick these little signs of professional making ready, for she knew that Dick, if he looked, would discover the same signs in her.

There were a dozen people at lunch and Betty looked sharply as she entered the dining-room for any evidence that the guests were expected to take special places. There was none that she could discover, they seemed to drift easily to chance places. A boyish giant held back a chair and smiled an invitation to Betty to occupy it.

"I'm Frank Hardee, Mrs. Courtney," he said as simply as a child might have told its name if asked. Here was an introduction unlike any Betty had ever heard or read of, or seen upon the stage, but she liked it and the honest smile of the young man, who instantly began to tell Betty that he had just returned from a visit to the crew at New London and that they were fit to row for a crown, every

man of them. As Betty could not get hold of even a word of the patter which might suggest to her what it was all about, she smiled sympathetically, and looked to see how Dick was faring.

Richard sat next to a rather breezy young matron Betty had heard called Mrs. Lansing. "And," thought Betty, as she listened to the giant by her side patter on about strokes, trials, spurts, conditions, odds and tides, "Dick knows nothing more of what that woman is saying than do I know of what I am hearing, for he never looks so absorbingly interested in anything he understands."

CHAPTER II

NATURALLY the Courtneys could talk of little else that evening, returned to town and their own apartment, than the important, the exciting events of that day: more especially the lunch at Banker Hall's. Betty had been elated when she secured even an invitation to call at the banker's country place to discuss business, but the invitation to lunch had been a triumph which, if she had dreamed of it, she had not so much as hinted to Dick. Yet, in truth, it had been involved in the scope of her ambition.

On the way home neither had spoken much; Betty was eagerly going over every incident of the great occasion, trying to find a flaw in the programme, their own part in it, in the manner of their hosts in bidding them good-bye which might suggest that anything had been said or done by her or Dick which revealed

to the Halls or any of the guests how foreign the Courtneys were to the place, the conditions of the people. She could not fix any circumstance which gave her doubt. The serenity, the simplicity of it all was an atmosphere easily understood, easily blended in with, by her and Dick, and Betty felt that their first experience of the kind reflected credit upon them.

Their business interview with the banker had been a success, and in itself a culmination of a life's ambition; but even that triumph was crowded out of Betty's mind for the time by the greater wonder of their lives of wonder: they had lunched at the table of people nationally prominent as social leaders of an enviable set; their fellow-guests were men and women, some of whom illuminated the brightest annals of social activities! Compared to this achievement Dick's famous act—that is to say, Monsieur Courvatels's act—of suspending Madame Courvatel in mid-air without visible means of support, and her vanishment, even while startled audiences looked in bewilder-

ment, her quick reappearance carrying her own blond-wigged head in her hand which he restored to its more accustomed place—that was nothing!

“What did the lady next to you say first—her very first words?” asked Betty when they were settled down for their gossip.

“Her very first words were,” answered Dick, almost reverentially, “‘What a ripping afternoon for golf.’”

Betty considered these precious words for a time in serious study, but could make little of them. Then she considered the woman, as if some thought on that subject might help to interpret the words.

“You know, Dick, that that was Mrs. Jack Lansing. She is a leader in that set, but she has a reputation for saying smart, and sometimes rather risqué things.”

“I should think so,” assented Dick: “‘What a ripping day for golf’!”

“What did you say then?”

“Never sprang my yap at all on that cue,”

explained Dick with pride in his society aptitude. "I wasn't quite wise, you see, for I never saw golf and that 'ripping' was a ringer on me, too. So I just gave her the eyes like I was saying, 'You are Sissy on the spot there, lady,' and let it go at that, playing for general results. The little stunt worked like a mice, for she came back at me like I had read a page of eloquent small talk all in the swim, and she says, 'I see that you would like to be out on the links, too.'

"Finding that I was a scream with the first nighter I countered on her with the mug I put on when a jay in the audience thinks he sees me palming his ring while you are reading the name engraved on it. It made good, at that, for I saw that she was putting it up that I was the sweetest little thing in the conversational line she had bumped for a long time. It's like money from home to make a reputation for a wise talker if you have the strength of mind never to say a thing—just listen kindly."

"You certainly worked the trick plenty good," commented Betty, "for I saw that she framed you up for a star gossip. But, of course, it is those dummies who can look as if they were busy feeders of talk lines who get away with the reputation of being wise talkers. And besides, it would be a hard thing to put your foot in your mouth when it's shut."

"Something in that, as the man said when he put his shoe on with a mouse in it," Dick admitted.

"But, oh, Dick!" exclaimed Betty in a rapture, "how glorious it was to see how simple they were when you knew how swell they were! That was what nearly took the breath of life out of your doting little wife. They are nothing like they are represented on the stage, are they?"

"Nothing is," Dick asserted.

"We must have seen nearly every prominent parlor actor and actress on the stage," added Betty, filled with this phase of the wonder, "but not one came within a million miles

of being a little bit like the real goods. Did you notice that they didn't act at all? Just quiet and easy and—and careful while not seeming to be trying to be careful. Fine!

"If it were not tossing posies at ourselves I would say that our special stage training not to seem to be doing anything when we were doing our hardest work makes us more like those real things than the legitimate actors are."

"Maybe our always having to seem not to be careful when we have had to be so very careful—so darned careful!—helps us to seem like the real things," Richard commented. "But what happened to you near the end of the turn when that lad with the shoulders a mile wide passed you a line of talk?"

"That lad," explained Betty, who had much satisfaction in displaying her knowledge of such things, "was Mr. Frank Hardee, and his mother is one of the colony leaders, like your Mrs. Jack Lansing."

"We had stage box seats, all right, then.

But what was it gave you the jolt when Hardee said something near the last curtain?"

"That," replied Betty, with a grimace, "was when I came nearer to heart failure than ever before in my life. The time the bandits in Servia shook us down for all we had in the world was a picnic compared to it."

"Gee!" exclaimed Dick, with a lively memory of the Servians, "it must have been a warm proposition."

"Warm?" said Betty, "it was hot, if you'll believe me. Frank Hardee is a nice boy. He was stroke on his 'Varsity crew, whatever that means. Well, we were chatting away like a variety team doing a sidewalk conversation turn, when he plumps out with: 'Oh, Mrs. Courtney, did you see the Courvatels—those clever legerdemain people who have retired from the stage?'"

"I'd just got my black coffee, and to gain time to see if he were on, or had only fluked, I raised the coffee and drank. Dicky, dear, I'm telling you the honest truth: that coffee

was boiling! Did I flabbergaster? Not Betty! My tongue is one blister this minute. I took a good peek at him as the coffee sizzled down my poor throat and I knew as well as I know up stage from down that it was a fluke."

"Sure thing," remarked Dick, comfortingly. "What wise little men we were to make up like comic paper French professionals; you with the blond wig over your dark thatch, and me with the tooth-pick moustache and chin point. And our French dialect."

"And sometimes our French, when we were stumped for a cipher," laughed Betty. "And oh, Dick, your French is certainly queer."

"Didn't learn it from a fashionable teacher as you did," protested Dick. "But I could take a safe chance that no one in the audience understood my French; for unless a listener learned it from strange gentlemen of adventure and such——"

Just a trifle raise of an eyebrow by Betty made Dick end his speech in a plainly manufactured cough. His one-time association with

strange gentlemen of adventure was a topic she did not encourage.

"The best thing we did," Betty continued, "was always to keep the Courvatels and the Courtneys separate. No professional friends off the stage and precious few on it. If people who did turns with us, or in the same theatres, could never recognize us off the stage I knew very well that that nice young man didn't recognize me. So I said, when I could speak, for the burn was awful, 'They tell me the Courvatels were very clever.'

"'They've quit the stage and gone back to France,' he said, and I just said 'Really?' I said, 'Really,' like that, Dick, I said."

Richard allowed his silence to testify his pride in Betty's cleverness in meeting the situation presented by Mr. Frank Hardee's interest in legerdemain before he commented thoughtfully, "I'll tell you what, Sweetmeats, you look like a lady. Understand what I mean: of course you are a lady for being a hunky-dory, all-around, straight woman; but

I mean that you are a lady right in the class with those fine-haired dames we sat in with at lunch, because you never have any 'Oh, Heavens! where am I at?' airs about you. You never make a bluff at being anything except what you are—off the stage—because you are all right as you are. See?"

This was an unusually long speech for Dick in his non-professional capacity. Professionally he could talk as long, as fast and as interestingly as was necessary to hold an audience's attention while Betty was doing any professional service required to perfect their work; to read a puzzling inscription on some object borrowed from the audience, or to conceal or produce any property needed for a trick. Otherwise he favored brevity.

Betty accepted the compliment calmly and considered the point involved before replying, "Now, old chap, don't think I'm flagging myself for a press agent notice when I say that what *you* say sounds all right to me.

"Those who are never sure of their class-

standing are the gazaboos who are always doing hurry sprints for the spot-light. The real things are as well satisfied at left or right center as in dead center.

"I read one time in a play—I think it was (it was a book, anyway)—where the main guy says, 'Where McGregor sits is the head or' the table.' Are you wise to the proposition?"

"Accent that a little," begged Dick, slightly puzzled by the social problem he saw involved.

"The way I read the line," explained Betty carefully, "is this: those real things we met to-day don't have to set up a big noise to make people understand that they occupy the head-liners' dressing-rooms. They *are* head-liners, and they know it; that is the main proposition, and they are satisfied with it as it stands. If there is anyone in front who doesn't know it, it doesn't give the real things any sad thought because, you see, they don't care a wee penny what is thought of them by anyone except their own class. They never mug to get a laugh

on the outside. If they had to dress on their trunks in the property-man's room they'd be to the good just the same as if they had the star's dressing-room."

"Say, Betty," exclaimed the enlightened Richard, "if you had gone in for playing legitimate parts you would have been in the Eddie Booth class for getting your lines over the footlights. The real things are real because they are, not because the programme says so. Sure!"

There was a silence of some minutes before Betty went to a table and took up a frame holding the photographs of two handsome youngsters, a girl just in the dawn of lovely womanhood, dressed in academic cap and gown, and a youth irrepressibly grinning, and dressed in a shockingly dirty football uniform. Her husband followed her movements with his eyes, waiting for a cue by which he could read her thoughts, an accomplishment in which years of professional practice had made him marvelously adept. Betty looked at the pic-

tures with all of a fond mother's love showing in her eyes.

Dick, standing by her side, looked at her and risked a guess, saying, "If the Harlem theatre makes half what we figure on we could star the kiddies in real society without a rehearsal."

Betty laughed outright, kissed the pictures, beamed on her husband and said, "That's the answer! Who knows that Monsieur and Madame Courvatel are Mr. and Mrs. Courtney? Not a manager, not a fellow professional, not the master of the academy where Paul is, nor the principal of the school where Virginia is. Indeed, with the single exception of poor Louis Dubois, I cannot recall a single human being who knows us both as the Courvatels and the Courtneys. Louis, being your valet on and off the stage, could spot us, but he's safe in France.

"Dick, I made a low estimate,—Banker Hall said so when I showed him my figures,—and if we are not enough to the good to quit the show business before the kiddies come home

to live with us, you can cut me out of the act and call me a has-been."

Richard beamed back at his wife, and proved that he knew what further was in her mind by saying, "My folks, back in grandfather's time, belonged to the silk-stockings push. I've heard my mother do a line of talk about the family that put them in the opera-house class socially. I've got a property somewhere,—a seal ring with one of those do-dads they call a family crest cut into it. Say, wouldn't it put your eye out to get a letter from one of the kiddies with the thumb-prints of that crest not doing a thing but snuggling down in the wax on the envelope? Oh, scissors!"

"You never told me about that prop.," exclaimed Betty in breathless reproach. "A family crest! Oh, dumplings!"

"I never told you because many a time when engagements were slow and salaries low and slow I've hocked that ring so that we might eat. I had a hunch that if you ever saw it you would annex it and sink it so deep in your kick

we'd go hungry before your pride would let you dig it up for me to flash at my uncle."

"Where is it now?" demanded Betty.

"Let's see," mused Dick. "Where did we store that trunk of excess baggage? Was it Boston, or Seattle, or maybe New Orleans? I have the warehouse receipt and will send for it."

"Ring in a scurry call for it," said Betty.

"With an income and a crest we'll land the kiddies in high society as easy as I ever took a pack of playing cards from a parson's pocket."

"But look here, Betty," her husband said seriously, "the kiddies are to get their look-in at the swirl of the swell, if you like; but I won't stand for you to pass them into the show and hang around on the outside of the tent yourself."

"Oh, as to that," laughed Betty, "it always needs a couple of grown-ups to take the children to the circus. We'll be doing high-life stunts ourselves, all right, just the samey."

CHAPTER III

NO reader but would be entertained with the story of how Mr. and Mrs. Richard Courtney prospered during the two years they owned and controlled the destinies of a Harlem vaudeville theatre. But to delay on that rung of the ladder Betty had set out to climb would only keep us from the even more entertaining story of their experiences higher up. It would be agreeable to relate something of the cleverness Betty and Dick displayed in concealing their ownership and management of the theatre while they still enjoyed its brilliant rewards in profits, giving to an agent the rewards of managerial astuteness.

With the bank intervening as the nominal owner, with a discreet and well-paid agent conducting under orders, there was none who suspected this quiet couple, these patrons of good concerts, of the art galleries, of the book shops,

of being other than what surface appearances indicated—people of ample means following musical and literary tastes with exemplary enthusiasm.

Our greater concern is now with the conclusion of that period. After two years of rich return the theatre was sold at a handsome profit. This, with the additional gains Betty had made through her always wise investments, added to their possessions when they ceased to be the Courvatels, made the Courtneys rich.

"And so," remarked Betty, when she went over the accounts with Richard, "if we haven't done any climbing during these two years we have made a mighty handy ladder to put against the wall of society which none of those on the inside are likely to order off the premises. Eh?"

"Have a care, Sweetmeats," cautioned the delighted Dick. "You are learning to talk in such stylish language you'll call suspicion to yourself. 'The wall of society'—say, that's as good as a book."

"Oh, I can make up speeches pretty enough for a heroine in a romantic drama as fast as you like, but I sometimes sweeten them with just a dash or two of professional slang. There's the real danger. That must be cut out. I've exploded a few before some of the dames down at the Halls'."

"Did it knock them?" asked Dick.

"Well, it didn't shock them, if that's what you mean. The danger was that it always made too much of a hit. Mrs. Jack Lansing always takes my slang with a scream, but she wants to know where I get it. Of course I put it off on pieces I read in the paper."

Readers may see from this remark of Betty's that during those two years while the ladder was being built, the Courtneys had not been altogether without the blessed sight of the walls they meant to scale.

Banker Hall, now a confirmed invalid, had visited America occasionally during those two years. Although he had retired from business he yet found it convenient and indeed agree-

able to see the Courtneys at the colony and advise with them about their finances. It was shortly after the theatre was sold, and the funds realized from that were to be invested, that an important happening displayed how well Betty had been preparing for her campaign.

The seal ring, which has already been mentioned and which Richard had recovered from its hiding among excess baggage, had been an inspiration for some of Betty's activities, a result of which was soon to be shown. She had used it for the first time as a seal on the letter Dick wrote to Banker Hall asking for the appointment to discuss investments after the theatre sale.

The seal had not impressed Mr. Hall, probably he did not notice it; but his wife was curiously interested in such designs, and seeing it on the letter asked her husband, "Who are these Courtneys, anyway? This note paper—in very good form itself, by the way—is stamped with the crest of the Fair Harbor

Courtney-Smiths. Mr. Courtney-Smith, you know, is really descended from a brother of the Lord Courtney who came over in 1628, and who left that brother here, when he returned, in charge of the land granted to Lord Courtney. Courtney-Smith comes from the Stillwater Courtneys, who are straight descendants of Lord Courtney's brother."

"Well," said Mr. Hall, with the smile with which an invalid warns away any too serious talk, "why should not my Courtneys be of the Stillwater Courtney family? They are just as well behaved, far more clever, a hundred times richer than any Fair Harbor Smith or Stillwater Courtney I ever heard of."

"To be sure," replied Mrs. Hall, with thoughtful conviction. She was an enthusiast in American genealogy, but she was a banker's wife. "To be sure."

It was on the afternoon of the day Mrs. Hall discovered the crest, that Betty and Dick made their momentous visit to the colony. This time they went down there in their own tour-

ing car, and all who saw them as they arrived, the women especially, realized that it was within the compass of genius for a woman to dress for car touring in a costume which did not make her look a fright.

"I should like," said Mrs. Hardee, who watched the arrival with Mrs. Lansing, "I'd give a nice prize, indeed, to know where Mrs. Courtney gets her clothes. I must have seen her now three or four times, and each time she has had a distinctive costume I never can get matched. She is the only woman I ever saw who looked absolutely smart in touring wraps."

"Why not ask her where she trades for her togs?" suggested Mrs. Lansing.

"One doesn't know her well enough to talk shop with her."

"There seems no reason why one may not know her," replied Mrs. Lansing, who had taken a great liking to Betty. "They are all right, if that's what's bothering you, my dear. Mrs. Hall wouldn't let her husband have them

down here on a day like this, when the Halls are practically bidding us good-bye forever—for they are to live abroad after this, unless they were all right.”

Betty felt the approval her appearance earned and inwardly glowed because of it. With a surprising quickness and ease gained from long professional practice she shed her wraps and veils into the arms of a servant, and as she sank into a seat near Mr. Hall her critics saw with almost despair that within those envied wraps she was dressed correctly for an afternoon on a lawn, if that was to be her happy fate.

“I don’t see how she does it,” sighed Mrs. Hardee. “When I emerge from automobile things after a tour I look like a rag doll.”

The Courtneys’ interview with Mr. Hall was brief and satisfactory, and then Mrs. Hall, who had been watching for the conclusion, went to Betty and said, “I see by your husband’s crest that you belong to the family of our dear friends the Courtney-Smiths of

Fair Harbor. They will be here this afternoon."

This was a cue for Betty as pat and welcome as if it had been rehearsed. She had never made an unprofitable investment, and she felt that she was keeping her record in that respect unbroken when she hired a searcher of genealogy to learn all that could be learned about her husband's family, having only the seal ring and Richard's somewhat sketchy knowledge of the subject as clues to work upon. The clues had slowly developed many interesting facts, all of which were pat to Betty's mind; they were so many lines she had conned well and could stand an examination in them fearlessly and with no need of a prompt book. The time, the circumstances, the very wording of Mrs. Hall's remark all suited Betty's plan, and doubly repaid the not small fee she had expended for the precious knowledge with which she was to make her first long upward step in her campaign.

"My husband's family," said Betty in a

low even voice which admirably concealed her inward delighted excitement and at the same time gave Dick his cue not to venture any improvisations, "my husband's family recognize the Courtney-Smiths as descendants of the first American Courtney; the then Lord Courtney's younger brother. My husband is a direct descendant, but we refrained from using the crest until we received acknowledgment from the present Lord Courtney of our relationship."

"How very nice!" exclaimed Mrs. Hall, beaming upon Dick and Betty as she never had before. "Of course we Americans should not bother ourselves with such things—only we do. It is enough for us to know, as someone has said, I think, that our fathers and mothers read Emerson and their fathers and mothers owned land and rented pews. Still, it is very nice. I think that's the Courtney-Smiths' trap coming up now. They will be so delighted."

She left them with the manifest intention

of bringing up the new-found relatives of her husband's protégés to share her delight. Her departure was fortunate for Richard, because there was evidence that in spite of all his training in what he would call "team work" he was on the verge of breaking his wife's injunction not to speak without a cue.

"Betty!" he exclaimed rapturously, now that he had his chance to speak, "you never spoke a line with better emphasis in your life. But, quick, before the next scene, put me wise to the situation, put me on. What was there in that word 'recognize' which went with such a scream when you passed it out to Mrs. Hall? She has no easy map to read, but when you tossed out that 'recognize' I was watching her close, and I give it to you straight if she wasn't the thoroughbred she is she would have thrown a fit of joy."

"You certainly were right on the job, Dicky, dear," Betty said approvingly. "I staked our whole game on the hazard of that one word. Whiskers, the gazaboo who pegged

me back five hundred for doing the genealogy search act, put me wise to a few tricks in the game. I got it from him straight that if you *claim* relationship it is up to you to make good your claim; if you *recognize* relationship you have the other party backed up stage. See? Then he has to saw wood while you smile and watch the clouds float by."

Betty's explanation of the art of jockeying for advantage in the social race went no farther then, for at the moment the name of new arrivals was heard—the Courtney-Smiths!

As when an eager warrior buckles on his sword Betty's eyes gleamed with the light of battle. She passed her hands deftly over her hair and fluffy waist, draped her skirt with quick professional precision, glanced at Richard to assure herself that he, too, was correct as to make-up, settled back in her chair and waited.

They both saw that Mrs. Hall made some statement to the newcomers which was received with looks of polite doubt, and that

then Mrs. Hall made some disclosure to the visitors which caused their first unpropitious looks to change into expressions of respectful attention. Dick in a whisper translated this change as he understood it to his wife:

"Mrs. Hall is telling the icebergs that our bank roll would make a piano leg look like a pipe stem," he said. "Now they are going to enter; pass me a cue if your lines come slow, Betty, for I'll be a little bright eyes of an understudy."

Even as Richard gave this husbandly assurance that he was then, as always, ready to do team work if required, Mrs. Hall approached slowly towing the icebergs. Betty's heart was fluttering a little, but her brain was clear, and her eyes steady. She knew that a crisis in her campaign was imminent, but she welcomed it. It had been her successful practice in her stage work to alter the manner of a trick sometimes as she discovered some essential trait in the character of the person in the audience upon whose bewilderment her suc-

cess depended. This had given her keen practice in reading character, and as she always had to take this advantage under fire, so to say, she was accomplished in concealing the fact of her intense interest in that respect. Now, as the Courtney-Smiths approached, Betty was studying them with results which might have embarrassed even them had they been able to read her running thoughts.

"The woman is stupid, suspicious, was a belle, wants to be always thought of as the grande dame, comically proud of her husband's family," thought Betty. "The Husband is a kind of heavy wet—not quite as stupid as he looks; rather good-natured if you have his confidence—and as I am a sinner I can see a resemblance between him and my Dick! Indeed they would look quite alike if he had not always lived a cow-like existence and Dicky had not often been obliged to be a bit foxy."

Betty was unconsciously mimetic, and as the icebergs drew near she raised her chin a little

to give her head something of the uplift she observed to be the characteristic pose of the lady approaching.

"My friends the Courtney-Smiths," Mrs. Hall was saying even as she threw off the tow lines and let the icebergs come to a slow stop.

There were bows, tentative hand shakes, murmured words of greeting. Then a pause.

"They are waiting for me to *claim* the relationship," thought Betty. "They have a surprise coming."

Mrs. Hall did not want to let the pause prolong to an embarrassing length, so she added, as if her words were a tag to the introduction, "They tell me they never had the pleasure of meeting the Richard Courtneys before."

This speech had the effect of shifting the attitude of waiting from the Richard Courtneys to the Courtney-Smiths. The latter had listened to many claims of relationship and dismissed them. But Betty was not there to claim. She would only recognize.

Mrs. Hall once or twice more broke the silence which the others maintained. Here the professionals had an advantage, for it is more difficult under some conditions to be silent than to speak. Betty had signalled to Dick to wait for a cue, and they, trained in silence as well as speech, remained serenely dumb, until Smith, the task of silence making him uneasy and annoyed that no "claim" was put forth for him to consider, said rather stiffly, "There is but one branch of our family with which I am not wholly familiar: the descendants of the Richard Courtney who sailed from Boston for California in 1848."

"Music has stopped, curtain's up," thought Betty as she signalled to Dick to speak.

Now the subtle difference between recognition and claim had not been altogether clear in Dick's mind, but that made no difference to his sense of what was due from him in the way of team play. Betty required his help, was all that he needed to know. He saw the light of battle in her eyes as he looked for his

cue and caught it, and then in measured tones answered:

"That Richard Courtney who sailed from Boston in 1848 was my grandfather. I am his only living descendant, and if you are the grandson of his brother then it appears that you belong to our family."

Smith slowly blinked as he received the shot, but Mrs. Smith, quicker than her husband to feel the full force of the tone of patronage with which Dick concluded, actually gasped. She looked at Betty as if expecting some renunciation of Dick's awful assurance in recognizing instead of claiming relationship, but she saw in Betty's eyes just a shimmer of mirth which made the older lady shift her ground quickly, and scarcely knowing what she did she bowed slightly as if in thanks.

"You have led such a rover's life," said Smith, and Betty knew that he was trying to cast a shade of suspicion into his tone, "that I have never been able to trace you."

"And I've had too many names besides my

own," thought Dick, but he only smiled in reply, for Betty signalled that she had a line to speak.

"Your grandfather," she said, smiling affably upon the male iceberg, who could not help smiling back at her (Betty could make a whole audience laugh, smile, or weep with less exercise of her art than she now employed), "was financially interested in the ship and cargo my husband's grandfather took to California—you may have heard of it."

The iceberg abruptly ceased smiling. His entire income came from the inheritance of that ship and cargo profits; and he had seen letters which suggested that Betty's grandpapa-in-law had had rather the worst of the bargain at the hand of the Boston partner. Betty seemed uncomfortably well-informed. It was time for the ice to melt. Betty was still smiling; but what if she should frown?

"It is most agreeable to have our relationship established," said Smith, "under the roof

of our mutual friends; but I shall be further gratified to establish friendship under our own roof. Mrs. Courtney-Smith and I will welcome you to Fair Harbor."

Betty knew that she had forced this invitation by the hint of her knowledge concerning the early Courtney shipping venture; but there was something theatric in the language which appealed to her. She signalled Dick to answer in the same character. With not a moment's hesitation that well-trained man said, carefully copying the male iceberg's style of language, but giving Mrs. Smith the benefit of his amiable glance, "We are tired of our careless, roving life, and when we settle down, which will probably be in this charming neighborhood, we shall enjoy an opportunity to renew the pleasant relationship which existed between our ancestors."

Betty repaid Dick's effort with a glance, thinking, as she afterward confided to him, that the first old gentleman in an eighteenth

century comedy could not have accented the speech better. She said nothing, however, only smiling again when Mrs. Hall suggested that the family reunion begin then and there over the teacups.

CHAPTER IV

IT was good to see Betty as the party walked to one of the tables on the lawn where tea was being served. As she strolled by the side of Mr. Courtney-Smith, seemingly deeply interested in his prosy expressions of regret that he had never had opportunity to visit California, where he hoped to go chiefly that he might look up the Richard Courtneys, she knew that she was the object of decided but discreetly veiled interest on all sides. She seemed to glance at no one, to be paying all her attention to her new-found cousin, but she did not miss the fact that her appearance created a favorable impression, and she knew that the marked respect with which her companion treated her was a distinct gain in her campaign.

The reunited Courtneys sat alone at one table for some time, but gradually many of the other guests strolled up and without intro-

ductions gossiped a little with the party. Mrs. Lansing, though, ordered Frank Hardee to draw up a chair for her near the table and made one of the party, showing an interest in Betty which helped the campaigner with Mrs. Courtney-Smith, who was still smarting under the recollection of Dick's speech.

At other tables gossip was rife about the Courtneys. "Very wealthy, as well as of good family," explained Mrs. Hardee to a companion. "The man is of an old Boston family—the Courtneys of the Courtney-Smiths, in fact—and his grandfather dug up millions in the California gold fields. The wife? Oh, a California nugget, I fancy, found in the mountains like a play, but polished in Paris, where she has lived most of her life. Speaks French like a native. Lovely children, I am told, being educated in this country."

"They would make a charming addition to the colony, would they not?" suggested another.

"Rather!"

Frank Hardee had asked Dick for a lift into town in his car, so Betty and her husband did not have a chance to go over the events of the exciting day with each other until they were alone again in their apartment. Then Betty sank into a chair with a long sigh of joy.

"I feel, Dick," she confided to him, "not so much as if we had had a lot of good done to us as I do that we have done a lot of good. It's just seraphic, that's what it is! To be among such people not as a show, but almost as one of them, is sweet—clear, heavenly!"

"Pretty nice bunch," Dick admitted. "But there were some things I didn't quite understand. Now, about that hot one you handed out to Cousin Smith. What was that about my granddad's business—the ship—which put Smitty on toast so quick?"

"That," responded Betty eagerly, "was one of the best situations the searcher turned up. It was as good as a plot. Whiskers, when he

was searching for some court records, found that your grandpapa had sued his brother—that was Courtney-Smith's grandpapa, you understand—on that ship and cargo deal."

"Smitty's granddad a little shy on box office receipts?" asked Richard, taking a keener interest in the result of the genealogy research now that he saw some human nature value in it.

"Exactly," assented Betty. "Your grandpapa did the actual turn while Smith's remained in Boston to attend to the box office. When it came time for the ghost to walk there was something not doing. All the remittances for cargo and ship profit were so overcome by the Boston east wind that none of it felt well enough to take a trip out to our grandpa. Well, we put in our claim for a percentage of the gross and they were still rehearsing for the trial when our grandpa died."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Dick. "Now I remember hearing mother talking that over. My father didn't like the play—didn't want to go

to Boston, as he would have had to do to take care of his end of the production—so the whole game was let to peter out. There was where Smitty's granddad got his share of what was coming to us: granddad died and dad didn't care to play the game."

"I wonder," mused the thrifty Betty, "why our father didn't take the trouble and time to go to Boston and insist upon his rights."

"Oh," explained Dick, half apologetically. "dad was running a faro game in Sacramento and making so much money that it was cheaper for him to let the case go than to pull up stakes and travel back to the States. I remember mother telling me about that later when she was a bit sore on the world because there didn't seem to be enough bread in it to match the jam—and we hadn't any jam."

"That explains then," said Betty, "what the searcher found. Courtney-Smith's father, who married t'other grandpapa's daughter, had the suit dismissed when your father failed to show up for further rehearsals."

"Sure," replied Dick. "He copped the gross receipts of the whole engagement and retired up. It must have been a fine roll. So when you just sprang a hint of the scenario on Smitty you had him on toast."

"Anyway," said Betty, "he melted gracefully, and it gives us a swell to help us up the next rung. I saw in a second that he knew of the suit and knew that I knew."

"Oh, he was on the edge of his foot, all right," Dick remarked cheerfully. "I can't feel badly about it—now that we are all fixed ourselves. Perhaps even mother would not mind if she knew what a lift the old account was to give us."

"There is one thing the plays and stories do not exaggerate," remarked Betty after a pause. "Did you notice the difference in the audience this afternoon when the tip was passed around the picnic ground that we had so much of the long green we had to ask Banker Hall to help us plant it?"

"I should say I did notice it!" declared

Dick. "With a lot of them it put us in the Vere de Vere class right on the jump. Many a lad and lassie coming through the rye had a glad eye for us then."

"And very properly," commented Betty, who was becoming a stout upholder for the respect due family greatness. "Those who gave us the glad looks knew that we had both the tree and the family. It's one thing to have the price of a ticket to a show, but if you expect to sit in a box you must be able to prove that if your grandparents were monkeys they were trained ones."

"Yes," Dick responded. "I suppose it makes a difference if you have an old family apple tree to sit under. I've heard mother say that grandpa would put on a boiled shirt, as they called it in those times, every day for dinner, even when they ate in a tent and the dinner courses were bacon and bacon and bacon. One day a man who played heavy parts in a neighboring mining camp blew into granddad's tent and began to rough-house

about that boiled shirt as being too good for the landscape. Grandpa reproved him by shooting off his left ear."

"Good work," commented Betty comfortably. "We've always dressed for dinner—when we had the dinner to dress for," she added with a grimace over some sudden recollection of the varying conditions of their former lives.

They talked for a time of the old days, not always days of ease and elegance, some of them quite otherwise, yet they had often amused themselves for contented hours with recollections of the hardships passed, of the successes achieved. Now, however, the talk languished, it lacked spirit and comfort and at last ceased. After a silence which was not without meaning to both each looked at the other and smiled as if at some thought each had expressed aloud. It was often so between these two: so long and keenly they had with intense sharp seeking practiced this "listening for unspoken speech." Neither was sur-

prised when some incident revealed that they had been understanding each other's silence, as Betty called it. It was she who now changed their unspoken speech into words.

"The Halls' colony place will be on the market as soon as they leave for Europe again," she said.

"Yes," he replied as if she had concluded a long discussion. "We could stand the price easily enough, and it would be a good investment, so far as that goes. The point is, could we make good in the repertoire? If the electric lights man shifts the spot on you, you must feel that you are not going to put the show on the gazink. That's what's in my mind."

"Oh, as to make-up," said Betty confidently, "I think we can stand all the light there is scattering around the colony."

"As to make-up," Dick assented, "we sure are classy. But, as I was saying, it is the parts. Sustained parts, you understand. It is one snap to spout a line or two of Hamlet; but to set out on tour with only Shakespeare

plays—Gee! What a lot of stage managing we would have to provide for to make good.”

“I don’t know even about that,” argued Betty. “I’ve seen some rather kittenish Romeos and Juliets who made good just because they looked the parts. That goes a long way even with such folks as the colonists. We won’t have to wear goggles to keep anybody’s dust out of our eyes so far as looks go, and that is a big boost in our favor. I know that you never had a yearning yearn for publicity as a *matinée* idol and neither did I, but if we had been cast for such parts we wouldn’t have been booed.”

Betty’s insistence upon her own proper looks was as impersonal as the praise she had for Dick’s undoubted good appearance. These were points she considered in her campaign with no more vanity than she would have been conscious of in saying that she could perform the simplest of her sleight-of-hand tricks.

Dick, who fully understood this mental attitude of his wife, smiled as he said, “Oh, yes,



'WE WERE WISE NEVER TO BE PICTURED EXCEPT
IN OUR MAKE-UPS.'—*Page 61.*

our looks are an asset, I know, and I know that we were wise never to be pictured except in our make-ups. That asset, as Mr. Hall might say, is an unimpaired part of our present working capital. The world knows the Courvatels, me with the toothpick waxed hair on lips and chin, you with the blond wig and the 'Oh, my, how surprised I am' eyebrows. No one has a lithograph which would hook us up with the Courvatels."

"Then," insisted Betty, "why would it be over our heads to play the happy, happy aristocratic, and raise pigs and automobiles under our own vine and palm leaf fan? What is there in the game we could not rehearse until we were letter perfect?"

Dick pondered the questions for a time in silence; looked at Betty, who indeed had at the moment an air, an appearance, of ease and refinement she had brought with her from her surroundings at the tea tables on the lawn—she could no more help mimicking what she liked than she could help liking what was good

to copy—then he submitted his final thought, and he knew that the same thought was in Betty's mind.

"If it was only for ourselves, the chance would be worth taking for the fun of it; but the kiddies?"

"Just so, the kiddies," said Betty, her eyes kindling. "For the sake of the kiddies I'd study and copy the manner, voice, language, games, sports, walks, yes, the very thoughts, of the aristocrats, and beat them at their own line of work. Dick, for my sake you turned from shifty ways which you liked as some men like drugs or rum, and you made good. For the kiddies' sake couldn't you play aristocrat? You practised six hours a day every day for a solid year so that you could appear at ease juggling a cannon ball, a cigarette paper, and an open razor at the same time. The kiddies are worth more work than that."

"Sweetmeats, I'm with you!" declared Dick decisively. "The kiddies are pretty nice little people—even if they are our own. I

know that you are playing this game so that they may glide along the same plane we have put them on so far. They have never been much anywhere except at their smart schools and at Uncle Homer's—and he's something of an aristocrat himself. We'll give them a chance never to see life except from the proper side of the footlights; never to have to muddle along under the seams, never—ah, well!"

"Dick, you are an angel!" Betty said, giving him a kiss.

"I may be," he replied, "if there are more kinds of them than is generally reported. Now, as to our parts: I suppose the main proposition is to forget our slang and learn theirs; to get along with few words and no gestures; never to mug; never to look much bored, or much pleased; never to be loud, dumb, surprised, or indifferent; and to play cards so bum that it nearly gives me the dodads when I try to think of it."

Betty smiled at Dick's summary of the outward and visible signs of aristocracy, and

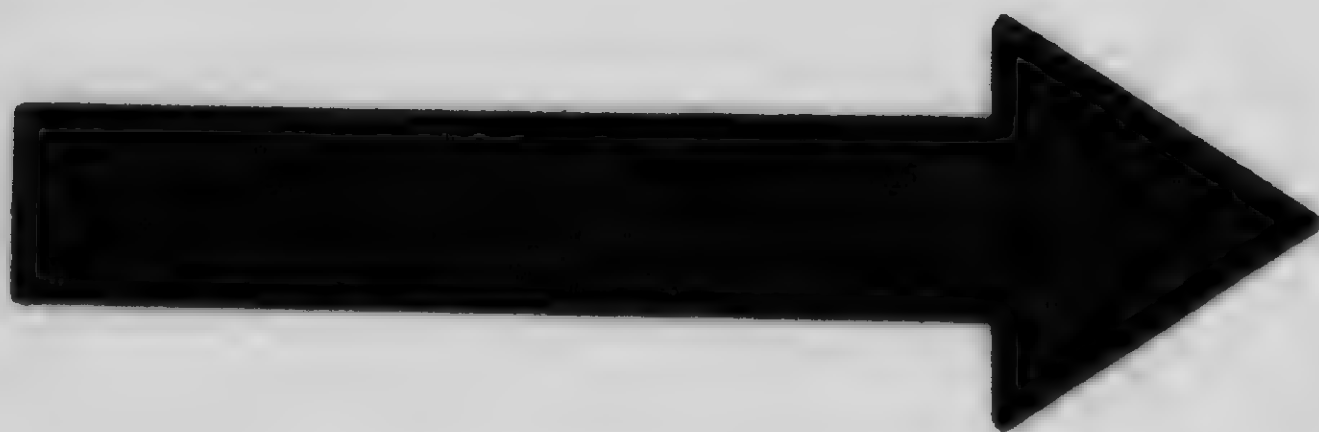
commented, "We may make a few breaks which we can laugh off as coming from our rubbering about so much in queer foreign joints; but when it comes to dressing—My, my! I almost hate to think how easy it will be for me to make the smartest dame in the bunch look like a left-over from a discarded lot of last year's has-beens!"

"But be careful you don't over-emphasize your line playing before a fine audience," warned Dick, with a smile.

"Trust your Elizabeth for that," she answered. "I'll dress just enough better than they do to make them ambitious to equal me—not to make them hopeless of doing so. I'll remember the kiddies. That will keep me from making enemies by dressing too well or doing anything too well. Just well enough."

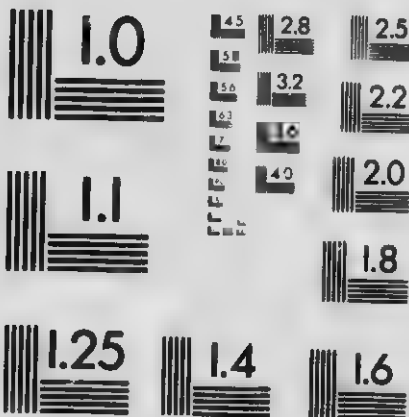
CHAPTER V

IT soon became known at the colony that Mr. and Mrs. Courtney were the purchasers of the Hall place, including the model farm a few miles away. That the farm was included in the purchase was a fact in the Courtneys' favor. It was, or certainly had been to Mr. Hall, an expensive luxury, but farming was a much approved pastime among the older colonists, who sturdily paid rather steep annual deficits in their determination to restore the ancient industry into good repute with gentle families. As a strange matter of fact Mr. Courtney did have a keen interest in the raising of pigs. This commendable industry had never occupied an hour's time of his life, but he had become beset with the beauties of an idea, that the raising of pigs had for uncounted centuries gone on under conditions which were not fair to the pigs. He



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liked to think of it as some men who have never had a golf stick in their hands delight in the game, its patter, its possibilities, many aspects of it which might surprise regular patrons.

The rumors which resulted from a hint of Mr. Courtney's interest in pigs were distinctly in the favor of the newcomers.

"No man," said Mr. VanAlystine, one of the oracles of the colony, "who cares for the raising of pigs as a pastime, so to speak, can be other than a gentleman farmer, and what this colony needs is men of that kind."

"Yes," said the elder Mr. Hardee, "the pastime is expensive, but very praiseworthy. If Courtney can work the Hall farm a year for less than it takes to run a town house during a season, he is a genius—and the colony also needs geniuses."

The departing Halls left the house in commission and Dick and Betty moved in with everything prepared for housekeeping and entertaining. The banker's staff of house and

outside servants had been retained at Betty's desire.

"If we engage an entire new troupe we might have trouble in rehearsing them," she explained to Dick. "We can start the season with the old company and work into our parts without having to gag too many lines."

Richard agreed to this as he did to anything which seemed to offer comfort or service to Betty in this great emergency.

"Yes," he said. "We can clock the gaits of this bunch, and if we find any skates among them we can discard and fill our hands with issers."

Social affairs at first moved with serene formality; Betty studying every sign of her new surroundings with intense industry. The first callers were Mrs. Lansing and Mrs. Hardee, two ladies upon whom Betty had early made favorable impressions. Indeed she had expended special efforts to that end, hearing in her gossip with Mrs. Hall that those ladies were leading spirits in the colony's social

life. The number of cards a servant brought to Betty when their call was announced surprised her. They seemed to announce to her that her visitors were a large company, for besides the cards of the two ladies were two of Mr. Lansing, two of Mr. Hardee and Mr. Hardee, junior. The ladies only were present in the flesh, the others in the spirit, and Betty's little book of authority explained this to her. She was learning both by precept and example.

The Fair Harbor Courtney-Smiths called soon, and the two branches of the family exchanged dinners with formal promptness. Then all the guests Betty and Dick met at Fair Harbor called, evidently at the request of Mrs. Courtney-Smith, and some who had been requested so to do by Mrs. Hall both called and invited the newcomers to lunch or dinners, a round of ceremonies which taught Betty much and excited and delighted her beyond even her powers of expression.

"It's just heaven, Dick," she said. "It

is heaven on earth, and that is all there is to it."

"Yes," Dick admitted with an enthusiasm which was largely reflected, "it is fine to meet so many people who talk about so few things, for it makes it easy to get up in our parts. But, gee! if they would only eat as few things as they talk about. I am beginning to fear that I never will get another solid meal again. It is all right for the women, I suppose, and I suppose that the men get good solid chunks of real food at their clubs. But Dicky has no club to feed up in, and he is beginning to get a belt line like a low girl's. That chef of ours would expire in a horrible nightmare, I suppose, if we ordered him to serve us a meal of pig's knuckle and sauerkraut, with dill pickles on the side and a stein of Milwaukee special to wash down the good goods."

Betty, whose own good health, lively spirits and activities provoked a fine appetite, smiled sympathetically. "Don't say such tantalizing things, Dick," she begged, "I am awfully

happy these days, to be sure, but I have dreams of another kind of happiness, and they take the form of pumpernickle bread, Bismarck herring, and a mug drawn from the wood. But I have troubles to arrange in this house, first, and then we can plot a strategy to get something into the larder which is not all sauce and soufflé."

The domestic troubles Betty spoke of came through her knowledge of French. Several of the retained Hall servants were French and they had a growing habit of speaking their native tongue in Betty's hearing. Their supposition that the newcomers did not speak French became a conviction. But Betty spoke French as well as she did English.

She was a music pupil in Paris when she married young and handsome Richard Courtney, who had no other business there than to induce Betty to marry him, for indeed he had followed her from California for that purpose. She repaid his persistency with the reward it deserved for the unreasonable reason

that she was in love with him, and she remained in that state of heart regarding him through all the days of which some were not bright and many were shady. There were those months of their adventurous wanderings in India when the authorities were led to detain them—but I have promised not to tell of those days. There was nothing in them which cannot be explained honorably, so why make occasion for explanation? Our story will proceed in proper sequence if we return to the domestic troubles which arose from Betty's knowledge of French and which was unsuspected by her servants.

It is probable that no woman ever lived who could talk faster, more easily or better than Mrs. Richard Courtney, but she also had a genius for silence.

"Why, I tell you, Dick," she used to say to her admiring husband when he praised her for some heroic exercise of this rare and beautiful accomplishment, "all women can hold their tongues better than any man. They

couldn't keep their places on earth if they were not able to be silent when a born deaf and dumb man would talk the rivets out of a boiler.

"Most men are great idiots about all women, and prove it among many other ways by saying and doing things which would provoke a hitching-post to angry eloquence. But what is woman when she is so provoked—what is she when anything important to her depends upon it?—a darling, cunning little clam. At such times she has the keenest regard for her health and her job. She may not always be so when other peoples' healths and jobs are concerned. Why should she?

"If woman had always talked when she was provoked to do so she would have faded out of the scheme of things so long ago that now she would be but a dim sweet memory of a dream."

But as to Betty's domestic troubles which we should have reached before now had not she herself interrupted: she began to overhear

rather free talk among the servants of increased profits which the chef was making on his purchases, of the new perquisites of the housekeeper, of delicacies for the servants' table charged as laundry soap or whatever, of growing graft and dishonesty in the mounting bills Betty paid monthly.

She overheard provoking jokes at her own blindness and her husband's stupidity in not discovering how they were being robbed and cheated, but not a word said Betty. Her own impudent maid delighted to discuss these amusing matters with the French butler in the very hearing of her mistress; it added a tang of fun to make these jests in Betty's presence. Not a sign came into Betty's eyes, not a muscle of her lips so much as trembled to reveal that she understood every word of the pleasant gossip. And this was the more to her credit, for she was a woman of lively spirit and warlike in defense of her rights, and would have enjoyed exposing the wench to her face, but her scheme required that she remain

silent until she learned all that there was for her to know of the ways of servants in such an establishment.

Dick had less patience. "Let me bundle the whole hunch out in the stable yard with their luggage in the middle of the night and wallop the life out of the men," he begged when Betty confided the state of affairs to him. "It would do them good, and me, too," he added, feeling the muscles of his wonderful forearm, which he seemed to think needed some lively exercise.

"Not yet, Dick," she urged in response to this appeal. "You know what comes from too short rehearsals—a poor show. We are in the rehearsal stage of our performance now, and we must get well up in our parts. These women here think highly of housekeeping. They are as good as housekeepers as the men are fake as farmers. You see we are getting into a quiet set, not a fast one. The women talk and think seriously of their houses, and it is good business for me to be letter perfect

in the part. It is rough going, for a time, but think of the bumps and bruises and cuts you have taken practicing a new jugglery act which you would finally do so easily and gracefully on the stage that it would go with a scream at your cleverness."

"But I don't like to think of you as an easy mark, dear," Dick still urged.

"And I don't feel easy as an easy mark," she admitted. "It jolts me to find that I am paying double butcher's and grocer's bills, that I am being touched from boots to bonnet. I separate from long green as painfully as any lady in the land—especially when I am being buncoed—but I am willing to pay for this lesson to save us from many a frost in future seasons."

"I guess you are wise," Dick agreed at last. "But promise this: when you do get a new invoice of hired hands include one who can fry eggs. If I sit down to another breakfast and that cook of ours sends in dinky eggs smothered with chicken livers floating in a

brown custard I surely will go into the kitchen and cut his ears off, even if it isn't good form in high society."

Betty smiled and then asked with sudden interest, "Why don't you chase into town and sneak us out a supper?"

"What?" exclaimed Dick. "Do you mean pig's knuckles, pumpernickel, beer—the whole darling dream of earthly paradise? You are not kidding me, are you?"

"I am as on the level as a barn floor," Betty assured him.

Richard beamed his delight. "I must frame up a trick to smuggle the goods into the house," he said. "The whole colony would sit up nights to forget us if they knew that we supped on such horrors, and the servants would desert us before we were ready to fire them if they were wise to our rathskeller layout."

"Oh, I don't know about the neighbors," Betty replied. "Some of the women here, Mrs. Jack Lansing, for instance, strikes me as the kind who would snuggle up to a bite

and a glass like that and never say a word of protest—not a word. But do make a hurry ring up on the act, for I am going through an ordeal which needs all my strength, and such a supper would put me into the Sadow class.”

CHAPTER VI

ON the morning after that happy day when the Courtneys were inspired with the plan of a secret Bohemian supper, Richard went into town carrying an empty suit case, and looking exactly like a man who was off for a two or three days' journey. But when he reached New York he took the case to a favorite shop of the old days and ordered it stocked with those delicacies whose names alone are a delight, and whose substance gives renewed joy in life. It is a tribute to her wisdom that Betty discovered that it was such things as such shops keep which would give her strength to face her domestic crisis.

When with critical judgment Richard had made a list of the stock he wished, he gave himself a further treat. He strolled along the streets, pretending in his mind that he knew not whither, but ever his feet carried him

toward the river front where ships were unloaded of strange and fascinating cargoes from far distant ports; where were crews of strangely foreign brown men, familiar enough to Richard, though, and pleasantly so; and sights and sounds which brought back the days of gipsy wanderings yet dear and romantic in his memory, though a forbidden subject in Betty's presence.

A great cask of whity brown seeds broke open as it was released from the sling which raised it from the hold of a ship, and a stevedore shoveled the hard, lime-frosted nutmegs back into the cask.

Dick smiled at some recollection the pungent odor brought to his mind, and stopped at the side of the ship to watch the unloading. He had been seated on a smoothly worn pile head, filled with the boyish joy of pure idleness, his vagrant mind as far away as the Banda Islands, when he became conscious that a voice somewhere above him was monotonously repeating "Presidio!"

"Presidio!" a name as potent as the odors about him to bring back old memories. "Presidio!" Who in such a place could know what it meant to him? Dick was born near the San Francisco military reservation called the Presidio and during a part of his life had been known to some people as "Presidio." He had learned caution in his life, and though now keenly eager to see who it was who called him by a half-forgotten name, he turned slowly and glanced up toward the sound of the monotonous voice as if yet only idly curious. As he looked he saw peering over the rail above the high iron sides of the ship a face precisely as expressive of any human emotion as one of the nutmegs scattered on the wharf.

"Hello, Calcutta," he said in the same low voice the other had used in calling "Presidio," and his voice was still low and indifferent, though the sight of the man had excited him, "In the name of the great Buddha of Siam where did you come from and what are you doing?"

The man leaning over the rail said, not looking at Dick, but at the fantastic and unfamiliar skyline of tall buildings which jutted far above the low markets and warehouses near by, "I'm in hock five pounds seven, silver, to the skipper. He has warned the dock watchman to keep an eye on me, and if I try to escape I shall be arrested on some fake charges. If I were only a Bombay Coolie I would have a consul to appeal to, but I belong to no country, I have no consul and I didn't suppose I should find a friend here until I saw you. It is five pounds seven, silver, Richard. Could you spare—do you happen to have as much as that to spare?"

Pleasantly excited as he was by this strange meeting, Dick had noted the change from "Presidio" to "Richard" and attributed it to his appearance of prosperity, and he smiled, thinking, "Calcutta is a man of the world, after all." He hurried to the captain of the ship, and he, too, proved to be a man of the world, for when Dick, prosperous looking as

he was, and authoritative, too, demanded an account of Calcutta's indebtedness, the business of releasing the stowaway was quickly and pleasantly arranged, the captain explaining that in holding his unlisted passenger for the price of his transportation, less some credit for clerical work the passenger had done, he was following a rule imposed upon him by the owners of the ship.

This business attended to, and as Calcutta had no baggage to delay him, the stowaway soon descended the gang plank with his rescuer, all his earthly belongings on his back—none on his feet, incidentally.

Calcutta could speak many languages, could hold his own in a discussion with adepts on some profound subjects. One of the last things he parted from when he began to frequent the pawn shops was a silver medal presented to him by an admiring professor of mathematics in the—but never mind the name of the academy. Now its most brilliant pupil stood on the wharf by the side of Dick, bare-

foot and bareheaded, wearing an open-throat cotton shirt and a pair of much-used overalls. You would not have been sorry for him if you had seen him—not knowing about that silver medal—for he looked like a care-free stoker ashore for the first time after a long voyage and determined to part with some of his wages in the nearest beer shop.

“Well, Cal,” said Dick, noting his clothes with amusement, “I guess we had best undertake to dress you by degrees. We’ll find some togs in this part of the town good enough to carry you to a better part, and there we will find some good enough to carry you home in.”

“Home, Richard?” said the man, stopping and placing a hand on Dick’s arm. “Have you a home at last?”

“Wait till you see it, old chap. It will put your eye out.”

“Thank God!” said Calcutta, simply. “And Elizabeth?”

As he asked this last he looked as if he

would have taken off his hat if he had worn one.

"Betty is nothing except to the good," answered Dick. "She will be romping with joy to see you."

"I hope she will not be offended," the man said, glancing down at his clothing. "Not offended at my coming to her country, I mean. You see I did not know where the ship was bound for when I went aboard. We did not stop until we reached Port Said and by that time I was—I was in hock and watched."

"Betty offended?" exclaimed Dick. "She never forgets—anything. She is a woman and will remember first the things which frightened her, but the other things—oh, Betty won't be offended. You helped us once, and Betty—she won't be offended."

As they talked they went to a water-front clothing shop where Calcutta was fitted out with decent apparel and promptly came to look like a first mate on shore leave as much as he looked like a stoker before.

"Now we will go uptown," said Dick, surveying Calcutta whimsically, "and get some glad rags which will make you look like a gentleman once more. Say, Cal, did you ever think why it is that you look exactly like any part you are made up for?"

"Surely, Richard, I have often thought of it: It is because I have no individuality of person. I am only a useless but curious brain boxed up in a body equally useless but not in the least curious—wholly commonplace."

Calcutta made this explanation with one of his very rare smiles. There was nothing lacking in him mentally; indeed in that respect he was plus rather than minus, but when his brains were put together there had been a slight misadjustment of convolutions.

Later, when they emerged from a Broadway clothier it was as Dick guessed: Calcutta now looked like a sedate business man, a banker perhaps, who had been passing his holidays on his yacht. Dick looked him over admiringly.

"If you had ever gone in for the stage, Cal, you would never have had to make up your map."

"Oh," replied Calcutta simply, "I've played some real parts in my time—some you don't know of, I mean. I took service as a butler once in an English officer's house, and a year later when a friend of mine was absent from his church—he should not have been,—I preached a sermon in his pulpit and was congratulated by the same officer for my eloquence. He did not recognize his ex-butler."

"Well," said Dick, laughing, "we will do a little in one of those lines now. Come with me and get some supper things for Betty, and then we will go home."

When they reached the colony it was Calcutta's suggestion that he should go unseen by any inmates of the house to a little vine-covered pavilion on the lawn to wait until Betty should be prepared for his appearance. "I will surely remind Elizabeth of—of some things she wishes to forget," he said, "and I

may not be welcome. You will learn, and if it is agreeable, then I can see her."

Dick agreed to the plan, for he already had some doubts on the subject. Not on the outcome, but how best to introduce this old acquaintance from another world, another life!

Richard found Betty as pleased as a child with the delicacies he brought home and disclosed to her admiring gaze.

"We'll eat shy at dinner," she said, "and save our appetites. The butler's gone and we can make that an excuse for ordering a light dinner."

"What happened to the butler?" Dick asked, glad for an excuse to postpone the subject of Calcutta until he should contrive a skillful manner of introducing it.

"Oh, that rascal!" she explained. "I heard him brag to my maid that he had enough of our stuff packed away in his trunk to live on for a year, and that he was going to take a vacation. I couldn't stand *that*, so I sent for the constable and had his baggage searched—

Oh, the villain!—and then ordered him to begin his vacation by the next train and not be seen around here when you returned, or you certainly would cut his ears off.

“Honestly, Dick, when I waded into him with the kind of French he and the maid, too, could understand, he nearly fainted. I can talk street French as well as that of the academies, and I gave him a reputation to carry away with him in his mind he will never repeat—except to the hangman, perhaps.”

“Fine!” exclaimed Dick. “Good work! I wish I had been audience.”

“But we will forget the butle., dear,” Betty added good-naturedly. “I’ll lay out and serve that supper myself. My word, how I do yearn for a speaking acquaintance with it!”

During the evening Dick made a score of false starts to tell his wife of Calcutta; but each time he balked and each succeeding start came harder for him. Finally, after one more clumsy attempt, Betty looked at him searchingly and said calmly, but with intense interest

showing in her eyes, "What is it, Dick? You have been trying to confess something for an hour. Out with it, old chap. No secrets!"

"I saw Calcutta to-day," was the skillful form his confession finally took.

Betty stared at her husband with frightened eyes. Calcutta! Her mind swept back over many strange and some sorrowful days. Calcutta! Those were the dark hours when she stuck to Dick with sturdy loyalty, stuck to him to save his good name almost to the point of sacrificing her own; days they had not spoken of for years, but days neither could forget; days which had some careless gipsy wanderings, some hard, some profitable times too; but days when all her patient, determined wit and strength which only love could prompt and maintain were exercised to avert a calamity, the shadow of which now swept over her face. Calcutta!

"Oh, Dick!" she wailed.

"Well, deary," he urged, "we must not forget what he did for us, even if we forget what

we did for him. The clue we gave to the parties who were the really guilty ones while he was with us in—while he was where we were—he unraveled, after his discharge, when our lawyer and the detectives, native and English, could make nothing of it. Cal worked it out with that wonderful brain of his and saved us."

"So he did," assented Betty. "So he did, poor fellow!"

That "poor fellow" encouraged . . . k. He hastened to direct Betty's mind to other favoring points: "And afterward, when we had him with us as an assistant, remember that he worked out the numeral letter cipher we've mystified pretty nearly the whole world with since."

"Yes, he did, though it took us a year to perfect ourselves in it," Betty said. "He always insisted that if we ground away at it as he gave it to us we could beat the world at our profession."

"And we made good, and are here in conse-

quence." Dick pushed his advantage, seeing Betty softening. "We owe that to Cal."

"What a queer freak he was!" Betty remarked, her brow clearing. "I suppose if he had the balance wheel in his head that you have in yours he would be a world willy-wonder at some of those sciences of his,—an international top liner,—and such a simple, kind-hearted fellow too. I guess even his wooden face would light up if he could see us here, bosses of the place. Of course he was broke, and you staked him plenty?"

"Of course he was broke, and I staked him," Dick replied. "He had stowed away on a tramp steamer at one of the Dutch islands, and was caught and held in hock for his passage."

"Dear old Cal!" murmured Betty. "Wouldn't he wade into this kind of a meal? What!"

Betty had the supper laid out and was slicing dill pickles preparing to serve. "But where is the beer?" she asked.

"Cal's got the beer. Shall I call him?" asked Dick at a venture, seeing the kindly change in his wife's eyes.

"Oh, Dick, you've got him stowed in the wings—playing tricks on me, are you? Call him, of course."

Dick went to a low, open parlor window and signalled. Calcutta stepped in, carrying his valise containing the beer.

"Well, Elizabeth," he said shyly, but carrying her hand to his lips with a grace which would have looked strange in the barefooted man on the wharf, "shall I open the beer?"

Supper was neglected for the time, because Betty had to be told at once of the strange adventure which had brought their old friend to them. Calcutta told his story calmly after looking about the room where they sat with an approving, satisfied glance, and saying, "Your home! I knew you would have a home some day—you deserved that reward, Elizabeth."

The visitor was yet telling his story, slowly,

quietly, when a woman servant hurried into the room, saying, "Someone is calling you from the drive—it is an accident, I think, please."

They listened then, and through the open door heard voices.

"It is Mr. and Mrs. Lansing," Betty said to the men. "Wait here until I signal what to do."

She hurried to the veranda and soon they heard her enter the hall with those whose voices had alarmed the servant.

"Only a punctured tire," said the man's voice. "Can Courtney send us home in his car?"

"But in the name of heaven give us something to eat first," said the woman's voice. "We've been crawling along for hours getting this far and I'm starved. Also, my dear, I smell something ripping to eat."

Dick and Calcutta strained their ears, for now Betty was talking rapidly. Apparently she was expressing sympathy, giving assur-

ance that her husband would have his car around soon, telling the Lansings that they were welcome to supper, talking at lightning speed while Dick and Calcutta read the message she was giving them in cipher.

"Send Cal to put on one of your dress suits," the message read. "Let him appear as butler. Bluff through the delicatessen things as a picnic."

Cal read the message (the cipher was his own invention) and was on his way upstairs before Betty entered the room with Mr. and Mrs. Lansing, all talking and laughing. After a word of explanation, as if Dick could not possibly know what had happened, Betty said to her husband, "What a lucky thing we were having our Bohemian supper. Mr. and Mrs. Lansing are starving."

Mrs. Lansing had not finished paying her respects to all tires, to all automobiles and to all roads when Calcutta appeared at the door, correctly dressed, wooden faced.

"Supper is served, Madam," he said.

CHAPTER VII

"SUPPER is served." Why, there is the very model of the language of friendship, of good cheer, of cosy thoughts. People breakfast together through fate, lunch together by chance, dine together with malice aforethought. But supper! We do not meet delight around the corners of life by design; if ever an honest truce is compacted between enemies it must be at supper, and between acquaintances of indifferent mutual regard the rich rose of real friendship blooms when they sup together. Supper! The occasion suits the hour, the hour the viands and the spirit of it is peace and goodwill. A man who could harbor uncharitable thought over a good supper would not be worth the winning, should only be esteemed as an enemy.

For these reasons and for another which we shall shortly see, the automobile accident which brought Mr. and Mrs. Lansing to the

Courtneys' Bohemian supper was a fortunate one and proved to be an important step in the progress Betty had willed toward an established position in society.

That Mrs. Lansing was a leader in the colony's social affairs has already been stated. She was a highly vivacious lady, of a frank nature, an independent income, a joy in living and an insatiable appetite for the unusual, within, of course, the colony standards of propriety and good form. Her husband was a man of nicely adjusted, if limited, tastes and ambitions who had come to the belief that life was a mild joke which might become a bore had not his share of it been wholly regulated by his wife. He sometimes made experimental dabs at the scheme of things outside of the comfortably restricted surroundings established for him by his wife, with the notion that he might pluck therefrom some experience of a novel or exciting nature, but these were tentative and quickly abandoned for the rule of life made for him by Mrs. Lansing.

They were admirable guests for any supper, and especially so for such a supper as they now sat down to. Mrs. Lansing praised everything and frankly admitted her surprises as well as her delights.

"What I want to know," she said, devouring with enthusiasm herring preserved in white wine and spices, "is where you get such ripping things. Mr. Lansing has told me about such things—used to eat them when he was a bad little college boy—but I've never been blessed with them before."

Dick was tingling with joy over the way Karl (for such was the Christian name of him nicknamed Calcutta) was playing his part. He resolved, in answer to Mrs. Lansing's question, to show him off.

"Karl," he said, addressing the attentive butler, "where did these things come from?"

Betty inwardly gasped, for surely, she thought, that question of Dick's had placed Karl in a dire predicament. He had been in New York but a few hours of his life. She

knew that he had gone with Dick to recover the suit case stocked with the supper stuff, and if she knew which of their favorite shops that had been she would have signalled it to Karl. But she did not know and wondered at Dick's seeming blunder.

Karl turned with wooden-faced politeness to Mrs. Lansing, told her the name of the avenue, the number of the shop, the streets it was between, and added by way of triumph over the doubts he saw in Betty's eyes, "You may know it by a boar's head over the entrance, ma'am."

Calcutta's marvelous memory for trifling details had helped the Courtneys before that.

"Don't mind my cross-examining you about the most sacred secrets of your home and fire-side," Mrs. Lansing said when the butler left the room "but where did you ever get such a pippin of a butler? We have to put up with Apaches and idiots."

"He is a man," replied Betty, comfortably smiling at Mrs. Jack's language, which some-

times was wayward, "who was with us for a time when we traveled abroad. I'm tremendously flattered that he should come back to us. So few servants return to one, even when they keep out of jail!"

"Or off the gallows," commented Lansing gloomily. "Bad lot!" he added, goaded to unusual flights of speech by thoughts of his wrongs. "Very bad lot!"

Mrs. Lansing, pleased to hear her husband come out so brilliantly in conversation, pleased with her supper, warmed by the genial glow of good nature which always surrounded Betty, beamed on her hostess and asked, "Why don't we ever see you at the Country Club?"

In spite of all her watchful control of herself Betty could not help flushing a little at the question. Here was a sore point, a vexatious question which had caused Betty many hours of anxious speculation, and the reminder of it came suddenly and unexpectedly. The real social life of the colony centered in a club

which the Courtneys had not been asked to join.

Betty's trouble over the sudden presentation of the point was added to by her doubt how to meet it. She was helped out then—as many another time—by her professional experience. She had been an adept user of the truth in her professional work; had practiced it, indeed, to an unusual extent, and with great skill, for she had early discovered how much more easy it was to deceive an audience after having told them something they knew to be the simple truth. This phenomenon had so impressed her that she had once remarked to her husband, “I tell you what it is, Dick, when we get out of this and are no longer practicing deception as a profession I am going in strong for the truth. It is the greatest little work to make good with I ever took a peek at.”

Now, when Mrs. Lansing asked the simple question in all innocence of the position of affairs, Betty's active, fertile brain offered her

a dozen evasions, white lies and other turnings, but she rejected them, told the truth—and instantly made a partisan of the best social fighter in the colony.

"We have not been asked to join the club," she said.

Mrs. Lansing saw that she had made a blunder and colored more than had her hostess, but not being quick at invention she could offer no softening postscript. Instead of such an amend she exclaimed, "The club is run by a lot of stupid prigs. May I take the matter up? You will let me, won't you, please?"

Even after supper the visitors were not keen to depart by Dick's waiting car. The men went to the billiard-room while the ladies went upstairs, for Mrs. Lansing wanted to see pictures of the heir and heiress of the house of Courtney: Paul and Virginia.

On their way home, after a fruitful silence, Mrs. Lansing said to her husband, "Of course there's something unusual about those people;

they are not conventional. But they are all right so far as family goes,—related to the Courtney-Smiths,—and they are rich and honest, or the Halls wouldn't have introduced them. As for the wife, she's a dear. You should have heard her talk with me about the children—they are coming home soon—while you and he were smoking! I'm going to land them in the club."

"Sure!" said Lansing. "Man's all right. Bully cigars!"

After a few days' visit with the Courtneys, during which he made a minute study of the problem of Betty's domestic economy, Karl frankly asked for the place of butler. To be assured of being clothed, housed, and fed appealed to him as being a worldly state bordering on Paradise.

He had once spent a year working out the meaning and historic significance of an inscription on a stone in a ruined Persian temple, and at the end of the year—during which he ate little, was housed seldom, and dressed

scantily—he recorded his conclusions in a scholarly article, for which a London magazine sent him five guineas; and a man who offered to get the check cashed for him got it cashed—and disappeared.

Karl's learning had never profited him much; he had many such experiences, and had come to believe that the world was made like that for some people, and did not repine. The position of butler assured him a good living, a thing he had never had in his life, and he doubted if his plan to deliver before some learned American society a lecture on the "Symbolic Architecture of Lost Civilizations" would improve his worldly status much. He talked it over with Mrs. Courtney (he dropped the "Elizabeth" when he donned her livery), and she engaged him as her "steward," refusing to make the arrangement until Karl agreed to accept that instead of "butler," as the title of his office.

Within a week Karl knew precisely what each servant was stealing and how he stole. He replaced the delinquents one by one with

people he hunted up in New York, men he found in odd corners engaged in odd callings; with some of them he seemed to have had former relations, and they were glad to be found by him. They spoke strange tongues and some discoursed with him on learned topics when they were not washing windows or beating rugs.

"Take my word for it, Dick," said Betty, when the steward had worked out his plan, "These chaps Karl is installing will make it easy for us to give a show of all nations if we find out that that will be a good way to entertain the colony. The leading juvenile who polished the hardwood floors to-day is the lithograph of that fakir of Bagdad who sold us the working scheme of the fruit-tree-while-you-wait stunt. There is not a man Karl has landed so far who doesn't look as if he could turn me into a brass cobra or a mud Buddha if he wanted to."

"Never you have a fear of what they may want," answered Dick, reassuringly. "The

thing to keep in your mind is that every dark-eyed Willie boy of them will do just what Karl wants done.

"I have a strong hunch that most of them are men Karl has the goods on. I don't mean that they are crooks. We know enough about Indians to see that they are not of the crook class. What I mean is that they are probably political intriguers, the kind England is politely firing from India, or chaps who know too much about some court scandal and who have left their countries to save their necks, and were starving in New York when Karl hunted them up. You remember Karl was always traveling with that stripe of fellow. He had some sort of influence with them, though I supposed his interest in them was for those dinky articles he used to write and never got paid for.

"I'm banking on Karl. He'd cut his hand off and present it to you with his best bow if you'd ask him for it in that shape."

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. LANSING started upon her campaign to make the Courtneys members of the Country Club with her accustomed energy. She found not so much opposition as inertia to overcome; no one had been sufficiently interested in the newcomers until she took up their special cause to ask why they were or were not desirable members of the club.

"The trouble has been," said Mrs. Lansing, in a frank talk with Betty on the subject, "that your sponsors—if you understand me in speaking of the Halls as such—left the colony before you came here. Of course, it is a touchy thing to talk with any woman on a subject which seems to involve her social desirability, and I wouldn't run the risk if I didn't know that you are a sensible woman and will let another sensible woman speak plainly to you."

Betty managed to intimate that the consciousness of her own merit made it not only not offensive but agreeable to hear her worth discussed.

"Of course, my dear," replied Mrs. Lansing, who admired cleverness and knew that Betty had just made a clever speech and wondered how she could have done so without a moment's preparation. She would have been surprised to know that Betty, anticipating some such occasion, had carefully prepared the speech and rehearsed it with much thought before her glass. "Of course, *you* understand. We are a rather old-fogy set down here, and deathly afraid of assault by climbers. That is the reason that the sponsors for newcomers are generally looked to for such a thing as proposal for club membership."

"And a very good rule that is," declared Betty. "I should certainly not feel much flattered in being made one of a set which was not cautious about such matters. I know that anyone with money can find a quick wel-

come in some of the sets—such as that obnoxious so-called smart set. None of them for me, thank you.”

“Why, my dear,” declared her delighted champion, “you have put the matter exactly like an old colonist. Well, it is going to be all right. Mrs. Hardee and I and our husbands are going to propose you and Mr. Courtney, and everyone will be delighted to have you in; but, understand, someone had to make the canvass and talk things over.”

It is true that a canvass had been made, and Mrs. Courtney’s views on some subjects were asked for here and there in the colony, and it was to be able to report on those views that Mrs. Lansing had this talk with Betty. Mrs. Courtney was all right, Mrs. Lansing now reported; she held the most orthodox views on the difference between smart and conservative sets, and really was a woman designed by nature and training for fellowship in the club.

Another thing had helped: Dick had gone

in with serious enthusiasm for pigs. This was not a subtle social scheme on his part. In the day dreams of his professional life he had thought of raising pigs as an ambitious woman might think of presentation at court. He had the state of pigs close at heart. He believed that they had never been given a fair chance to demonstrate their personal preference in the matter of food, surroundings and habits. By a lucky chance this was a colony enthusiasm. The learned Mr. VanAlystine thought highly of pigs and called attention to Dick's enthusiasm as proof that there was worth in such a man it would become the colony to recognize. The old Hall farm, a few miles from the colony, was frequently visited by Dick in company with Mr. VanAlystine, where the subject of pigs was discussed with much grave ignorance and mutual satisfaction.

The fates were propitious: Betty's good account of her social creed, and Dick's pigs won. A notice soon informed them of their election to membership in the club, and had it been a

summons to the proudest court in the world Betty would have cherished it less.

"Dick!" she exclaimed, joyously, "do you understand what it means? Why, old chap, it is only a matter of playing our cards close to our chins for a year or two and Betty Courtney will be a leader here. And as for you—a box seat and a bunch of blue ribbons for your pigs."

"It looks like a good season," assented Dick.

"Of course," added Betty, beaming, "we must not chase ourselves over to the club the first day, or they will think we have been standing in line waiting for tickets; and we must not delay going for too long a time or it will look as if we were up stage about it. We must time our entrance to get the best effect out of it."

"I'll leave that to you," replied Dick, "if you are not too slow about it. Of course, we must not make ourselves look like Johnnies

on the spot, but I am dotty to tackle that golf game. They tell me that there is a bunch of wise tricks in it, and oh my, oh my! how I long to get my hands on something which will make me work my brains, muscles and eyes together. How would you like little Dicky to bring home to the tent a golf prize scalp. I'm beginning to see something in this life: pigs and golf. What!"

On a pleasant afternoon Betty and Dick drove over to the Country Club,—drove, because Betty had a feeling that automobiles were beginning to wane just a little in the regard of the very best people, except for railway station and long distance use. So she smiled inwardly as she saw almost as many carts and other traps as automobiles depositing colonists at the club house. Betty approved the way Dick took the none too wide gate at a smart trot, made a pretty turn to the veranda, where a servant stood with ladder and wheel guard, and she approved the style of

the yellow chap Karl had put up behind them, who was at the horse's head at the precise second Dick brought the animal to a stop.

"All very neat," she commented to herself. "A very effective entrance. I hope we bring off our first trick, speak our first lines as well. There are the Lansings. It is good to see a familiar face in the audience."

Jack Lansing came forward to give Betty a hand down the steps, and Mrs. Lansing joined the newcomers and made a little show of welcome which warmed Betty's heart. It was the most trying moment of her new career, and that little attention was a bracer to her. With all her wise worldliness, Betty could not quite command herself for this venture,—her first conspicuous entrance into a new and utterly unknown world. If it had been only for herself, or even for herself and Dick, she would have had all the confidence—or indifference; it amounts to the same thing—necessary. But it was for more: Paul and

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"THE YELLOW CHAP WAS AT THE HORSE'S HEAD AT THE PRECISE SECOND."—Page 112.

Virginia were coming home, and she was working to make a place for them. It was a tremendous strain.

Their arrival had been well done, the Lansings' attention had helped, Betty had the consolation (said to be next to that of religion) of being perfectly dressed; but she knew that the more effective one's entrance is on any stage the more one's audience expects. The worst of it all was, she found herself thinking, she had had no rehearsals in the part. "All those women looking at me now, and pretending not to, were unconsciously rehearsed from their cradles to their coming-out days for the parts they are playing now. They don't even know that they are playing parts! While they were learning how to sit, stand, walk, look, talk, listen, welcome, snub, even how to think, I was—well, I wasn't learning *this* game."

Betty's brain began to buzz as she tried to interpret the looks she met, and at the same time understand what Mrs. Lansing was say-

ing, "—and some of these people you've met; and you needn't be introduced to those you haven't met, because it isn't necessary; and there's my Jack taking your hubby off to the billiard-room. I hope hubby plays a good game, because if he doesn't Jack will trim him shamefully."

This eased Betty's mental strain. The thought of Dick, who could play billiards with two fingers of his left hand better than most experts with a cue, losing to Lansing made her smile, and looking about more coolly she saw her smile reflected in the faces of several women, who bowed pleasantly.

Betty made a quick, eager estimate of those smiles and saw that they were cordial, at least well-bred recognition, and that meant much to her. But suddenly she noted that the nature of the smiles changed. Something amused many of those who no longer looked at her but over her and beyond. Mrs. Lansing, who had turned around, explained matters:

"I think, my dear, one of your heathens wants to speak to you, or else he is performing some religious ceremony," she said.

Betty turned and saw that her Malay footman, who had led the horse to the carriage shed, had returned with it and was bowing gravely and continued to do so until he saw that Betty noticed him.

Then he said, "Begging pardon, Mr. Karl say no other mans must touch horse. Mans in shed say he rub horse down. I say no. He say yes, for tips. Begging pard., shall I kill other mans?"

Betty joined in the laugh this speech caused, and after telling the footman that he was right to obey Karl, but not to kill the tip-hunter yet, she turned to the company, saying, "You see what an advantage I have in my heathen servants,—murder committed to order, while you wait."

It was a lovely afternoon for Betty. She did not join the bridge players, nor go to the tennis courts, but sat on the veranda with a

number of women doing some fancy-work, placidly talking gowns, books, the next season's opera, and taking tea with them in an atmosphere all so quiet, well-bred, orderly, and simple that she inwardly hugged herself in enjoyment—with the more joy because she felt that she was making a good impression.

On their way home something communicated itself to her from Dick which chilled all the warmth away from her heart. Whatever it might be, she dreaded it so much that she could not ask about it for some time, and then said in a frightened voice, "Well, old boy! what is it?"

Dick told her of a scene in the billiard-room. A man there was trying to do a trick which Dick himself, some years before, made part of his performance. It was to pick up a billiard ball with two cues, bring the ball as if on rails close to his hands, and then roll it off the ends of the cues and make a difficult carom with it. It was extremely difficult and not very showy, and had been given up as part

of his performance before the Courvatels came to this country.

Dick had joined the group around the table to watch the man, who never succeeded, but who said he had seen it done by the great Courvatel in Paris some years ago.

Dick, who, like Betty, was ever on the alert for any reference to the Courvatels, looked at the man and met a look which told him plainly, "I believe you are Courvatel!"

He had to decide on some line of action, and said, "I think I can do that trick. I took lessons in it from the man who taught it to Courvatel."

"But you didn't do it!" Betty said, aghast, as Dick came to that part of his story.

"Yes, dear, I did," Dick answered, perplexed and heavy hearted. "I used to do it sometimes in my proper person at the Paris clubs, and thought the fellow might have seen me there, and was fishing to learn what he could learn. Of course I muffed the trick several times; but, Betty, that fellow suspects,

possibly knows, and he is a nasty-looking nigger, at that."

"Oh, Dick, it was too lovely to last—and the children coming home!" wept Betty.

CHAPTER IX

THE man at the Country Club who had intimated to Richard that he suspected him of being "Monsieur Courvatel" was Herbert Delancy, a cousin by marriage of Mrs. VanAlystine. Dick, of course, immediately after that disturbing event had made his own inquiries about him and, what was more fruitful of knowledge, had instructed Karl to learn what he could of the man.

Delancy was not a resident of the colony, but occasionally visited there, and Mrs. VanAlystine's position gave him the standing almost of a colonist. He was not popular, Karl learned, but as he never endeavored to assume any part in the colony's affairs, was not often seen, indeed, except when playing cards or billiards at the club, no friction had ever resulted from his presence.

"From what I learn," said Karl, reporting

to Dick, "he somewhat resembles a skeleton in the VanAlystines' closet. There is no open scandal about him, but he doesn't live the life these people live and he is not approved of."

As to Betty's first sharp fears, they had been allayed by Delancy's departure from the colony within a day or two of the Courtneys' first visit to the club. Karl had learned that Delancy's departure had been unexpected to his cousin, and that he had sailed for Paris. On the ship which carried Delancy went a letter from Karl to a friend in Paris, one of a somewhat mystic circle of acquaintances which seemed to extend around the world. "I shall know more of him soon," concluded Karl, telling Dick of his plans.

Another event of the greatest importance and liveliest interest to the Courtneys served to help put the Delancy affair out of mind for the time: Paul and Virginia were coming home!

"Home, Dick, just think of that!" Betty exclaimed. "The poor dears have never had

a home to go to in their lives. Isn't it glorious?"

While it seemed to the fond and proud mamma that the children had never had a home it did not, fortunately, seem so to them. They had been school-bred, but all their vacations had been passed in the very homelike home of Betty's uncle, where their parents had made yearly visits to them. Their being early placed in schools, their vacations at Uncle Homer's were all a part of a plan not to let the juniors know of the parents' profession, and this concealment had extended to Uncle Homer, who had long ago ceased to wonder about Betty and Richard's long absences and roving lives. In his heart, in truth, he rather approved of this, because it gave him all the more opportunity to pet and spoil the children.

Uncle Homer, a brother of Betty's mother, was a prosperous farmer with a romance. He was rich, but he had not performed a miracle—he had not made riches by farming, though he raised the best apples in the State.

A suburban settlement had grown up not far from his farm, had become popular and at last made his land so valuable that when he sold all but a "little patch" of ten acres (he said he could not turn around on less) for villa lots he found himself rich. Then he was discontented for the first time in his life, for he had not enough work to do. He was sixty-five years of age when his unexpected and half-resented fortune came to him, but he had passed so much of his life looking up into his beloved apple trees that he was as straight as his grandnephew, Paul, and almost as active.

This much has been told of Uncle Homer because he became, quite unknown to himself that such was the case, an important asset to Betty in her campaign.

When he brought the children to their colony home Betty persuaded him to remain for a long visit. She was very fond of him in a natural way, but she quickly discovered that he was a distinct asset to her new part in life.

"It is like this," she said to her husband, after the first delightful excitement of the children's home-coming had subsided enough for her to observe some effects produced by Uncle Homer in his quiet way, "Just as your being the Courtney end of the Courtney-Smith hyphen gave us a good advance notice, Uncle Homer helps us make good—he proves that the bill-boards haven't promised too much—anyway, helps to prove it."

"You are wise there, Betty," commented Dick. "It is poor business to overbill a show except for one-night stands. Where you hope to make a run you have got to cash the bills, as a fellow might say; you must show the real things the bill-boards promise."

"Of course, and Uncle Homer is one of the real things a family must be able to show if it expects to make a run in a place like this," said Betty. "He's solid. See what I mean, Dick? He's no property-man-made stuff, but he's the actual load of hay in the rural drama. He owns land, a sort of gentle-

man farmer. That is, he has the goods and is educated. That's the line these people stand for."

"Right you are, Miss Truetalk," Dick responded. "I notice that they don't fall for the distinguished professional relation a little bit."

"Been offering some?" asked Betty.

"I've cast out a timid line or two about people belonging to us who are the real things in law and medicine and fakes like those, and hinted of a cousin who writes like Shakespeare, but it was all a frost."

"Yes," explained Betty, "they shy at genius. They seem to be afraid that a genius might come and talk shop. Then they would be babes lost in the tall timber, for they know just nothing at all and try to forget what they do know—except, of course, how to be what a colonist must be. But that is not knowledge, I guess. It is instinct."

"Well," argued Dick, "it is more like early training which gets to be like instinct."

"Whatever it is, it made Uncle Homer a



"AND, AT THAT, UNCLE IS NO RUBE." *Page 125.*

hit with them from the start," Betty replied. "Why, the first rise I got out of Mr. Van-Alystine was when he heard that Uncle Homer had been head of the committee on roads in his board of—what is it?"

"Board of Freeholders," explained Dick. "Uncle Homer has been the boss gazaboo of his county roads for a century or two."

"There you are," said Betty. "You made your hit with Mr. Van with pigs—and a blessed lot either of you know about them—but I made my hit with him when he heard that my uncle was a roads committee. When Mr. Van heard of that he cuddled up to uncle and hiked him all over the county getting his advice on roads. Our first dinner invitation to the Vans came from that hike.

"And, at that, uncle is no Rube. When he took Mrs. Van in to dinner, wearing that dress coat of his, I could see her bubble with delight."

"That's a great property, that coat," Dick said. "I remember seeing Kendall, I think it was, in a Robertson comedy, dress a part

with an original model of that coat,—light blue cloth, gold buttons, long skirts, and all."

"Uncle bought the coat for his wedding—and the girl died before the marriage. I've often heard mamma tell the story. He looked like a picture of a Squire in a London Christmas paper when he took in Mrs. Van, and she got right into the picture, too,—played the part as if she liked the atmosphere and had her heart in it.

"It does us good here to be known as having folks who have owned land and lived on it. Uncle told Mrs. Van, after dinner, that you and her husband were raising the wrong breed of pigs, and she had him give a scenario of the proper pork to Mr. Van, and for heart interest it had a problem play backed off the boards."

While on one hand Uncle Homer and his homely merits helped the Courtneys with the elders of the colony, and helped to make the Courtney house a home, the presence of Paul

and Virginia completed the home, established a family life, and brought to the house its due share of the joyous fun which occupied the vacation days of the youngsters, and the first welcome days of liberty of those just free from schools and colleges.

This most marvelous transformation scene in the world, the change of a house into a home, was helped most by Virginia.

It is wonderful to observe how the names of some people become household words in their communities while the names of others sound strange on the ear. The summer had not passed before, to the homes of the colony, the name "Genie Courtney" seemed to be one wherewith everyone had always been familiar; it belonged to the daily life of the younger people, almost. You will see men and women of enormous vitality, ambition, patience and persistence struggle to gain some degree of that popularity and succeed only in making themselves bores. Success comes from an instinctive liking for others rather than self-

admiration, I think; and an honest pride in another's small triumphs goes further to promote popularity than greater triumphs of one's own. Genie was leading where colony-born girls were glad to follow before the summer was over, and her plans, whether for picnics, for the charity entertainment, for riding, driving, games, reading, were the plans of all.

This, much to the puzzlement of Betty, who had expected to be called upon to amuse and entertain Genie, instead of finding in her a chief support in all Courtney entertainments.

Genie, in fact, was a young woman of the world. That is not to say that she had been spoiled with worldliness at school, but that the school was conducted by a woman whose chief object was to prepare pupils to be young ladies wise in the world of fashion.

Genie herself was unaware what sort of product had been made of the raw material her instructors had handled in her person and mind. If she had answered truly what she thought the school had most notably developed

in her, she would have said an aptitude for delivering burlesque lectures in a manner to throw a class of girls into gales of laughter. The net product, however, was a young woman with a knowledge of the world, which was a protection to her—as that knowledge was meant to be—when she came to face the world; and an equipment of exact information regarding social form and etiquette which made Betty's eyes open in astonishment.

Paul was just a boy. He was prepared for college, and Dick's thought was to improve the time before college entrance in laying a foundation in the young man's mind that should be good for him. He thought to induct him gradually into understanding that he would be a rich man, but that as a youth he should realize the importance of money, and deal with it economically.

Their first interview gave Dick something to think about.

"I want to use the touring car to-day, dad," said Paul, walking about the grounds with

his father before breakfast. "I'm going into town to order something which we must have."

"For instance, what?" asked Dick, slightly surprised.

"Why, I know a fellow—he was in my class—who knows where the people are who will build a squash court for us, and the same people may as well lay out a tennis court. We can have a bowling alley built at the same time. Your belt line needs a little attention, sir, and the bowling alley will do the trick. I want to make the baseball team in my first year, and must keep in training; so I'll ask you to do a little work with me."

Dick gasped. "Have you any notion, son, what those things will cost?" he asked.

"No," replied Paul, looking at his father in surprise. "Does it make any difference? Are we short this term?"

The next day men were at work on the foundations for the new buildings, and Dick never again sought to instil rudiments of economy into the boy's mind.

Richard, however, beat Paul at all his games: beat him with such graceful ease and finished skill as added to the boy's love for his father a heartily expressed admiration. That was some satisfaction.

CHAPTER X

SO passed the summertime and came the fall with its insistent command for more out-of-door life, the real return, if not to nature, to nature improved by the better knowledge of man how to make her a background instead of the whole picture. There was only one regret in the Courtney home over the coming of the loveliest season of the year: it took Paul away to his college. The youth and Richard had become chums. The father was taken into the boy's confidence as to his ambition not only to make the baseball team the first year, if possible, but also as to his dream, rather than ambition, to pitch ball. So Richard took up again his almost forgotten studies of the mysteries of curves, drops and shoots, and after a little practice was able to impart to the delighted Paul some exact knowledge of the fascinating tricks which made him hope his dream might come true.

"Why, Dad," exclaimed the amazed youth, "you can pitch any kind of a ball that ever was pitched and can tell why. You would make a ripping coach. You can't have played ball for years, so how do you know so much about pitching?"

"I happen to know a general rule which covers the whole proposition," answered the proud instructor. "Every projected object which describes a curve does so because of a motion imparted to it besides the propelling movement."

"Great Scott!" gasped Paul, "but you must have crammed well in physics."

Dick was on the point of boasting that he had never studied that comforting science, but had acquired his knowledge from long and patient application of matter rather than mind. Then he thought better of it and said, laughing, "That was a bookish explanation, wasn't it? What I mean is that besides the motion you give a ball to make it go towards the batter you can give it one of many other

motions which will make it do a lot of other things. I know what those other motions should be, I know how to impart them to the ball, and I know exactly what effect will be produced. Oh, we were great ball players when I was a boy. Now, if I teach you what I know and you make the nine in your first year how are you going to repay me?"

"I'll invite you up to our biggest game and introduce you to all the players."

"Fine! Agreed. Play ball!"

Dick could not resist the temptation to mystify the boy. He tossed the ball a short distance from him toward Paul, who stood ready to receive it, but the ball seemed to change its mind, curved and returned near enough to the pitcher for him to pick it out of the air. Paul saw with frank, open-mouthed astonishment. "Well, Dad," he gasped, "you certainly were wizard players in your days! If I could do that I would be the biggest man in college."

"It takes not only your dad's knowledge but your dad's wrist to do that," Dick explained, and then the two boys played ball.

But vacations will end, and Paul went away; the autumn sped on its pleasant course with the Courtneys wholly accepted as colonists, with Virginia a decided favorite with the young people and Uncle Homer "A property no family should be without," as Betty said to her husband.

"Besides being the dearest old dear in the world, and my mother's own brother," she continued, "he's really as necessary a property— Oh, that's stage slang! What is the word?"

"Institution," suggested Dick.

"That's it. Uncle Homer is a family institution. It's wonderful how he fills in. The VanAlystines dote on him, and when he drives out with Virginia to make calls, wearing that auld lang syne lid,—hat, I mean,—I feel, Richard, that I have been a demure and domestic darling of fashionable country life ever since I stopped wearing my thatch—my hair, I mean—in pigtails."

The life rested on Richard, no less than on his wife, like a benediction even in the ab-

sence of his playmate son. He had mastered golf with a skill which made the old Scotch professional at the links regard him with awe; he was an untiring rider with the hunt; and had at last gone in for pigs, under Uncle Homer's guidance, in a manner that excited the envy and admiration of the colony's amateur farmers.

Betty was deeply interested, but in no wise concerned, as to Virginia's future. More than one desirable young man of the colony plainly showed a serious preference in his attention to the handsome girl; and though Genie treated all her admirers alike. Betty knew of a preference that she had and approved of it. Frank Hardee, a favorite with both Betty and Dick, was the youth who, even if Genie showed him no preference, brought to her cheeks the signal of her heart's interest.

When the balmy autumn days shortened and grew chill at winter's approach there were so many gaieties planned by the colony that Betty and Dick decided not to go into

town for the opera until after the holidays. Their first important social activities related to their own dinner and dance, for which invitations had been issued.

Paul was at home for vacation, and he and Genie entered with zest into devising novelties for the dance. It was while a family conference on this subject was being held, that Betty received a note.

"From Mrs. Van Alostine—" she said, looking at the seal.

"She will lead the Virginia reel with Uncle Homer, I'll bet!" exclaimed Paul.

The juniors did not catch a tone in Betty's voice which brought Dick's attention to his wife with sharp interest.

"—saying she will be delighted to lead the Virginia reel with Uncle Homer," read Betty, "and asking for a card for her cousin, Mr. Delancy, who is back from Paris."

When they were alone Betty said wearily enough to her husband, "Can we decline to send the card? I am told that he is asked

THE CLIMBING

to affairs as big as this production of ours, although he is not much asked to small affairs. Would it excite any gossip the children might hear if we left him out? Can we decline, after all the Van Alostines have done for us?"

"No," responded Dick emphatically. "Now, old girl, don't let any of the stiffening wilt out of your upper lip. If it comes to a showdown, of course we must make as graceful an exit from this stage as we can,—the Courvatels, Wizard Wonders of the Magic East, couldn't play a one-night run here. That's flat! But we've never done anything to make a reason why we shouldn't look any honest man or woman in the face. That's something. And we've our own money——"

"Oh, the money wouldn't be worth picking up in the street if it didn't bring this!" said Betty sadly.

"And we won't fade out of this without a fight," said Dick hastily. "We are conning nobody. We are traveling under our own names, spending our own money, and as for

that chap— Don't you cry, Betty, dear: I need all my nerve, and yours is part of it."

It soon became apparent that Betty and Dick indeed needed all their courage. Delancy at once began paying marked attention to Virginia. He was older than her other admirers, more skillful in complimenting by attention, by deference, by implied praise, by ceaseless devotion to her in slight but effective ways,—ways which ardent youths know nothing of.

Frequent meetings could not easily be avoided. It was a season of general entertainments, to many of which Delancy was invited. Betty was ever on guard. She made it as difficult as might be without letting her efforts appear conspicuous, for Delancy to be with Virginia; she devised ways of separating Virginia from him; and Delancy always showed that he, at least, understood Betty's actions and their motives.

Yet to Betty he was no less quietly attentive than to Virginia herself. He was different

with Dick. There were now and then veiled allusions, meaning looks, or smiles which set Dick's blood boiling and tested all his abilities as an actor; but he managed steadily to maintain an appearance of complete ignorance as to any duplicity on Delancy's part.

If this had been a combat of temperaments alone, Delancy would have worn out his opponent. A score of times when they were with men only, Dick had to grapple fiercely with an inclination to spring at Delancy's throat. Instinctively, Delancy was the cooler of the two; but Dick's years of incessant training gave him the advantage. Again and again Delancy made veiled remarks calculated to invite Dick to demand an explanation; but Dick apparently remained as unaware of any second meaning as were any of the other hearers. It was Delancy who first began to show a loss of self-control, of patience and temper, and Dick began to dread an undisguised attack.

It was when affairs had reached this stage

that Karl received a letter from Paris which he hastened to show to Dick.

This was from one of the friends in Paris to whom Karl had written to observe Delancy's movements there and to report what he did, and to send also any information which might be secured as to his life there previously, for Karl had learned that Delancy had lived much in Paris in his younger days. The letter explained much: the correspondent said that a Herbert Delancy, an American, had married and deserted a young woman, a niece of a priest. The wife could not be found and the writer could learn little relating to her present whereabouts. Her uncle had been one of the many priests belonging to a clerical order practically disbanded by recent action of the French government, and had left the country as any penniless emigrant might have done in search of a means of livelihood.

The priest, Karl's correspondent wrote, was known to have gone to New York and to have secured employment there with a sympathiz-

ing countryman. His niece had also left the country, at least could not be found, and the correspondent conjectured that she had accompanied or followed her uncle, because after her abandonment by Delancy and the death of her father she had lived in a home provided for her by her uncle near the monastery of his order.

The name of the priest and of the girl's father were given, and it was when he read these that Richard Courtney drew a deep breath of understanding.

"If things in this world were not always tangling themselves up in very much this way," Dick said to Karl and Betty as they discussed these developments, "I should say this is a bit stranger than a drama. The man named in this letter as the father of the girl abandoned by Delancy is the name of the man who taught me the billiard trick. He was the sort of a soldier of fortune a man like Delancy would be likely to meet and associate with, living in Paris, so it all appears plain,

now, why he suspected me when he saw me do the trick at the colony club billiard table."

"And," said Karl, who had continued his study of the letter, "Delancy, while in Paris this time, sought old companions of the man, evidently trying to confirm his suspicions that the American he already knew his father-in-law had taught the trick to was none other than a man known as Courvotel."

"I don't care whether he learned it or not," Dick replied. "We have as much on Herbert Delancy, and more, than he has on us.—that is if we are not following a wrong trail. The first thing to do is to find the ex-priest. Can you find him, Karl?"

"I, or one of my men here," answered Karl, referring to his strange staff of house servants, "will find him if he is in New York, as this letter says he is."

"Find him!" Dick commanded.

The next time Courtney met Delancy he looked him squarely in the eyes with menacing contempt. Delancy met the look steadily for

a few seconds, then his eyes wavered and turned aside.

"And if Karl finds the man," Dick said, telling the story to Betty, "the tables will be turned. It will not be Herbert Delancy asking Virginia's hand with a threat of exposing us as the Courvatels; but it will be Dick Courtney who will deliver the threat speech."

"No," interrupted Betty, "let me have the word, you the action."

Richard smiled, patted his wife's cheeks, and then smiled again as Betty pinched the muscles of his right arm and said comfortably:

"They are just like steel wires yet, old chap."

CHAPTER XI

KARL, on one side of his curious nature was as instinctive an animal as a hunting dog. There was something instinctive even in his aptitude for abstruse studies, he said. Languages and mathematics, a carking trouble to many students, he acquired instinctively, and in a line of shrewdness for which there is no scientific name he who had never been a student was a master.

This the Courtneys found out when in the old days in India he had helped them professionally. Physically he was not adroit; he regarded Dick's really wizard-like command of his muscles with admiring wonder, yet it had been Karl who had suggested many uses for those quick and powerful muscles Dick himself could never have devised.

To find the old French priest, if indeed he were in New York, was a small exercise of

Karl's wit; to learn from a man who desired to conceal his own and his niece's history what he desired to know of them was almost as easy, for Karl.

This he did, but then he had to call on Betty's aid, and soon she had made the acquaintance of the priest and his niece, and by the use of her sympathetic wit she presently had the whole story of Delancy's romance, his marriage with the daughter of the priest's brother, her short married life, her desertion when there were reasons the Paris police knew of why Delancy should reside elsewhere than in Paris, for a time.

The young wife wanted nothing so much as never to see or hear of Delancy again, but when Betty made her understand the reason for her interest in the man's career it was easy for Betty to get her promise to reveal the truth about Delancy, to confront him, if necessary, if Betty called upon her for that service.

With this knowledge in their possession the Courtneys knew that they had nothing to fear

from Delancy—his reasons for keeping the Courtneys silent being presumably stronger than theirs for keeping him silent—but there remained the danger of an explosion, a misunderstanding, which would cause a scandal in the colony.

Because of this fear that some accident might bring about mutual revelations before all their plans to silence Delancy were made, it was a relief to Betty, especially, when Delancy left the colony before the Courtneys were ready to go to town. He was to live for a few weeks, so the gossip of the colony said, in his New York apartments.

Even if he left, as Dick suggested might be the case, because he had some hint of their plan to force him into exile, his going was a relief to Betty, who had a reason for supposing—she could interpret Delancy's marked attention to Genie in no other way—that he would bring matters to a crisis by a proposal for Genie's hand. Betty dreaded to have this happen while they were still at the colony; she

knew her husband too well not to know that if Delancy went to him on such a quest the interview would be likely to involve them in a physical encounter.

As to this in itself Betty had no misgivings. She had been Richard's fellow performer, and knew better than anyone else what unending, patient, physical training her husband had undergone; how, to perfect himself in a single new feat, he had first devoted a year of work to the development of some set of muscles; how all this constant, intelligent physical work had made him almost as remarkable for his strength as for his quickness and dexterity. What Betty dreaded was that such an encounter might occur in the colony where it could not be concealed. That small, close corporation held few secrets, and the Courtneys were not yet well enough anchored to withstand the storm of gossip that would be raised by such trouble.

"But," thought Betty, "if we can postpone this until we get to town, no one need know."

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"THAT COMMITTEE IN BERLIN WHO WERE GOGGLING AT YOU WITHIN THREE FEET."

—Page 149.

Anything can happen in New York and not be known, and almost everything does."

"No, Dick," she said to her husband, "I'm not in the least shy—oh, what's the word?—not at all doubtful about what will happen if you and Delancy mix it up—meet in a physical encounter, I mean. He must be forty pounds heavier than you, and he used to star rather as a bruiser,—be prominent as a boxer, I mean,—but since that time in Germany when you coned—con—con— Is there no polite word for it?"

"Confounded," suggested Richard.

"Why, of course," assented Betty delightedly, for she was making rapid progress in polite language. "Since you confounded that committee in Berlin who were goggling at you within three feet, yet couldn't see your hands move when you took the props—the properties, I mean—from me, I've had faith that you could make up with speed what you lack in weight. You are too slick—er, sudden, alert, adept—for ordinary men."

THE CLIMBING

Richard smiled as his wife recalled a notable occasion when a committee of distinguished German scientists solemnly declared that Monsieur Courvatel had not done a certain thing they thought they had seen him do, because they had not seen him do a certain other thing without the doing of which he could not have done the thing they thought they had seen him do, although, on the whole, there was no doubt that he had done it.

"And all in the world it amounted to," said Richard, commenting on his own thoughts, "was that they did not see my hand move when I exchanged with you the sealed package for the unsealed one. It is always the simplest tricks which fool the most."

"That's true," remarked Betty. "So I thought I'd call on Mrs. Van Alsyne to-day and mention that her cousin's attentions to Virginia seem to have a serious purpose."

"And so find out from her if she knows what we know concerning him," Richard promptly rejoined.

Betty laughed at this example of domestic mind reading. "Oh, Dick!" she said, "you see why I must always be square with you, for if I tried to be anything else you'd come the old mind-reading trick on me, and— —"

"And give you a kiss," interrupted Richard after cutting short her speech in the manner his words indicated.

The interview with Mrs. Van Alostine came about without Betty's seeking it, for that lady called to offer the Courtneys the use of her residence in town during their stay, as the Van Alostines had decided to go South without stopping in New York.

Betty murmured sympathetically that she hoped Mr. Van Alostine's health was not the cause of their forgoing the delights of the opera. She said this in her most confidence-inviting voice, for she had easily discovered that his health was not the subject on her caller's mind, and she wanted to know what the subject really was.

Besides the advantage an intensely sympa-

thetic nature gave her in divining another's, and specially a woman's, state of mind, Betty's professional training was a help to her here. Accustomed during all her stage career to the keen exercise of every perceptive faculty to aid her in reading the minds of the cautious and suspicious, the open mind of the subject now before her, the product of a simple, open life, plainly showed to Betty a second motive at work,—something beyond the matter of the town house.

"Mr. Van Alostine has been looking so very well lately," Betty added tentatively.

"He is very well," said the caller, with a sudden plunge of determination, leaning forward to place her teacup on the table. "I fancy it's pigs."

"Pigs?" queried Betty, thrown off her scent.

"Yes. Your dear uncle has made an enthusiast of my husband on the subject. He walks miles and miles every day looking after the pigs."

"Genie is out at the farm with her father looking after our pigs now," confided Betty, with so slight an emphasis on the name of her daughter that her caller was not conscious of it, and would have been vastly surprised to know that Betty had placed the emphasis to lead her gracefully to the subject she at once took up.

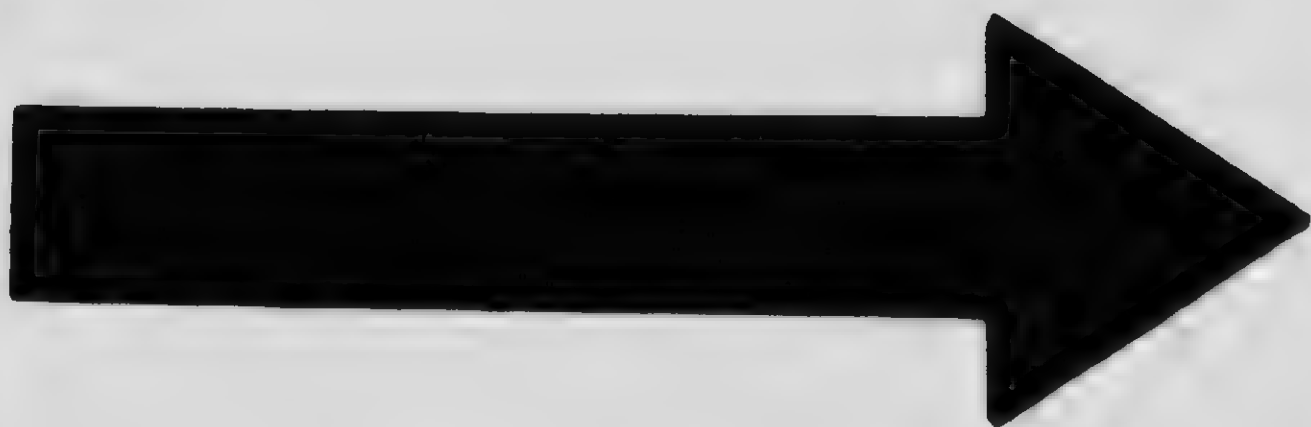
"Yes, Genie. Everyone is so fond of her, —so unspoiled! My own daughters are both married."

"And so happily, everyone says," murmured Betty, refilling her caller's cup.

"Exactly," replied Mrs. Van Alostine. "It is a compensation for a mother when she loses the companionship of her children to know that they are happily married. Our daughters married well. I don't mean in a worldly sense only; but well—well——" She hesitated for the word, and Betty whispered it sweetly as she dropped a lump of sugar into the tea:

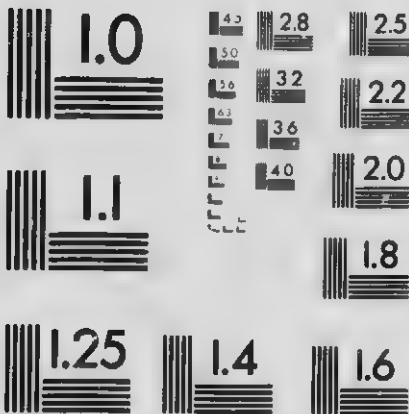
"Domestically."

"Precisely. You are so clever with words!



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One of our sons-in-law goes in for golf, and the other for something in the way of investigation,—I think it is cuneiform something. It takes him to the most outlandish places, digging up dead cities; but his wife, our eldest, is devoted to it,—wears native frocks and such. A mother cannot be too careful.”

“Indeed, she cannot,” remarked Betty with decision. “But, then,” she continued more thoughtfully, “how are mothers to know—sometimes?” She was sure of her ground now.

“I suppose it is the right of one woman to warn another,” resumed Mrs. Van Alostine, “in a case—if she—— Don’t you agree with me?”

“Her right!” exclaimed Betty. “It is her duty.”

“Yes, her duty,” repeated Mrs. Van Alostine. “Her duty, even when——”

She ceased speaking, caught her breath, then began to weep softly.

Betty went to the elder woman’s side and

laid her arm gently on her neck. "If you were going to speak of Mr. Delancy's attention to Genie," she said, "you need not hesitate to do so. Genie does not care for him, and we have learned something which makes us disapprove of him."

Mrs. Van Alostine looked up hastily. "He has made me very unhappy about this," she said. "He has persisted in urging Mr. Van Alostine and me to help him in his suit. He says we can influence you. Instead of doing that, I—I came here to warn you. Matthew—my husband—thought I should do so. They, Matthew and he, have had some trouble about some wretched checks or drafts. Everything was not quite proper, not regular. It cost Matthew thousands of dollars; but he overlooked the matter to prevent even the appearance of scandal. But in spite of all that, Herbert has demanded that we help to influence you in his favor. Although he is only a distant cousin, the thought of a scandal in our family becoming public nearly kills me."

She rose, and sobbed as frankly as Betty, who, her tears flowing in sympathy, put her arms about her.

"Would it be a relief to you if he could be kept away from this country—always?"

The elder woman lifted her head high and shook it, as one shaking off something which smothers, and then uttered a long sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XII

THE holidays came and closed, and with their going the colonists made their preparation for departure. Some went on their usual winter trip to the south of Europe or to Egypt, some to southern American resorts, but most of them opened their town houses for a winter season of social activities and the opera.

Betty and Dick discussed this question with reference to possible complications which Delancy might bring about. Dick decided the matter.

"We will go to town, dear," he said. "We have the best of the affair as it lies, and, anyway, we must have it settled. He must be dealt with openly sooner or later, and if when he is called he is ugly about it, and in a rage or out of revenge tells the world that he knows we are the Courvatels, we have got to stand the consequences."

Betty shuddered and moaned.

"But don't you worry too much, Sweet-meats," Dick added. "Karl thinks that Delancy is not entirely certain as to the Courvatels and the Courtneys being the same team. The man who taught me that billiard trick—I wish I had never seen him or learned his useless trick!—is dead. No doubt that Delancy learned from him, when he was his son-in-law, that he had taught the trick to the Courvatel, but that could not have interested Delancy much at the time. He made no investigation then which put him wise as to who we were in private life, and it would have been hard for him to have learned anything if he had tried. Now the only man who could tell him what I was like in my proper person is dead, and Delancy is probably working his bluff—or will work it when he thinks the time is right—on the assumption that I am the man. He has unconfirmed suspicions about me; I have the goods on him.

"That is the way Karl has figured the thing

out, and, however he does it, Karl generally arrives at the right conclusion about such things."

"Yes," admitted Betty, "that is so. Also you are right, old chap, about facing this thing until it comes close enough to be disposed of."

"And Genie is, oh! so eager for the season in town. The Hardees are to be there, and I believe that Genie is very fond of Frank and he of her. She does not care for the South of Europe, but she says if she can see New York as a young lady it will be like having a dream come true. Besides, Paul can visit us for the Easter vacation."

Dick grinned a little now. "Paul will let us visit him then, perhaps," he said. "The baseball coach has been trying Paul out in the cage and he thinks he can make the nine. If he does he will be doing hard work on that job about Easter time, and the delights of New York won't make a hit with that young man."

"If he inherits any of your quickness of eye and muscle I should think he would be teaching the coach," remarked Betty. "Oh, Dick, it would be more punishment than we have ever done anything to deserve, to have Delancy go up in the air and make a scandal just as Genie is having her first town season and Paul is earning university honors on the baseball field!"

Any doubt as to their plans was decided in favor of town by a second visit made by Mrs. Van Alostine to talk about her town house, and this time she really talked about the house and not about Delancy.

"It may be very well for young married people to entertain in apartments," the caller said, "but the biggest and finest apartment in New York is not a home, and your daughter Virginia must have a home for what entertaining you do for her. She has admirers—you must not mind my speaking of that, for we all see it—and as for me, really, Mrs. Courtney, I don't think it would be quite re-

ligious for a girl to be married in an apartment. It is so—detached.”

Betty, smiling her approval of these excellent sentiments, could not help letting her mind stray for an instant to the time when her apartment was a tent.

“That,” thought Betty, “was sometimes detached, more often attached.”

But she murmured, “True. A girl must have a home of her own to learn how to make a home for her husband, and an apartment is no more like a home than a bird cage is like the forest.”

“Exactly!” exclaimed Mrs. Van. “And so lovely! I dote upon the forests.”

So Dick and Mr. Van arranged the little formality of the lease, and then to the ecstatic joy of Genie the move to town was made with many other colonists.

“Oh, Mamma!” cried Genie, “it will be so perfectly jolly to see New York without a governess teacher always telling you to keep your shoulders straight and not to let your

eyes roam from the appointed thing you were sent into town to see. I *did* use to look out of the corners of my eyes sometimes at things which were not down on the lists we were to see, and I have got about a million of half-seen things I want to see wholly this winter."

"For instance?" asked Betty.

"Well," responded Genie thoughtfully, "I am simply dying to know what one would see and what one would come to if one, instead of walking directly to one's seat in the orchestra through the main entrance of the opera house, were to walk to the right or the left down those lovely, mysterious lobbies on either side. Some of the girls say that when you go with your mother you may go and walk in those lobbies between the acts. It must be heavenly."

"We will try and take you that far into heaven," Betty agreed.

"And another thing," Genie added coaxingly. "I've always been simply crazy to see where the actresses go to when they leave the

stage. Out beyond the wings—I think they call them wings. It must be mysteriously lovely out there. Did you ever have a chance to see what it is like behind the stage?"

"Why, of course, my dear, your father has often taken me back there."

"Do you suppose papa could arrange to take some of us there this winter?"

"I dare say he could," Betty answered. "But you must leave some of the charming things to do after you are married. Married people go to all sorts of jolly places together which it is rather—rather not nice for unmarried girls to go to."

"Well," sighed Genie, "there must be thousands of places it will be all right for papa to take me and which must be lovely, for the governess teacher always shooed us past them so sternly. Anyway, it will all be stunning!"

Genie sometimes pieced out her own not limited vocabulary with some of Paul's slang, as young ladies with brothers will do in spite

of the most cautious of mammas, and in the matter of slang Betty was almost austere in her training of Genie.

"Slang," she would say to her kindly, "is one of the most inexcusable sins of well-bred people. Our language is rich enough for the proper expression of any emotion, or the relation of any facts, and I am certain you would avoid it if you could understand how it jars the ears of the polite. I am speaking of young ladies, of course, my dear, for I understand that young men nowadays are incapable of speech if denied the help of slang. Paul, for instance, has a language your mother can only dimly comprehend. It is a little hard on a mother to be deprived of means of communication with her son, and it would be unendurable to have to give up comprehensible speech with her daughter also."

Genie, properly impressed with her sins in respect to the language her mother so respected, promised to pay more regard to it, and avoid as much as one could, who had a

brother, the use of slang words. But sometimes in the early delights of those days in town the young lady was really hard pressed to find appropriate language in which to express her happiness.

"If you were not so opposed to slang, mamma darling," she said after her first co-tillion, "I should say that I had the most ripping time of my life last night."

"Well, dear," responded Betty indulgently, frowning only enough to show her disapproval of the word, "try to tell me in language I can understand."

We need not pause to overhear the girl's confidences to her mother. Enough for us to know that Genie, if not the belle of the colony set in town, was one of the most popular of the young people.

Not that Betty needed Genie's delighted accounts of her experiences to be informed. Never was a mother more observant, never a mother who had the wit and skill to appear not to be so. Genie was acting her pretty little

romance of a girl's first season, and Betty, the better actress, was also playing a part, but with the art to conceal. She was Genie's most watchful guardian; she appeared to be her most complaisant chum.

Except for the vague menace of the presence of Delancy the elder Courtneys found their own position improved even over that which they had established in the colony, for the fact of their occupancy of the Van Alystine house counted in their favor with some of the colonists in town who had been a little conservative—"up stage," Betty called it—in accepting the newcomers.

"The Van Alystine hall mark is just as good a thing as was ever stamped on the Courtneys, sometime the Courvatels," Betty said to her husband, observant of the effect mentioned. "It is curious to watch what makes a hit with some of these people. It has certainly put us up a rung that we were offered and took this house. It would not have been half as effective if we had rented

a stranger's shack—residence, I mean—or bought a place of our own. I think there is a sort of patent of respectability goes with some houses as well as with some families."

"Yes," assented Dick, "just as some stage turns go well in some theatres and are a white frost in another theatre in the next block. The best part of the deal is that it has made Papa Hardee as chummy as his missus and kid have been from the first. He was a little coy down in the country, but he is warming up beautifully since we have been camped here. Suggested to me the other day that there was a place for me on a board of directors in his concern, if I felt disposed to pay a little attention to the business. Can you see your Richard with his feet under the table of a high-class board of directors, looking wise and counselling about the affairs of a trust?"

"Of course," replied Betty, looking off into space. "He is a nice young man and so domestic."

"I miss that cue," Dick said, puzzled. "Am I the nice domestic young man?"

"Certainly not. I thought you were speaking of Frank Hardee," Betty said.

"Only Frank's papa; uninteresting, but necessary for income. But how does the young man show his domesticity?"

"Oh, he cares for all the things Genie cares for, and always gets ahead of everyone else to help his mother on with her wrap. I've always hoped Genie would marry a man who is always ahead of all other men in doing polite acts for his mother. They never go in for cuneiforming."

Delancy appeared at several houses where the Courtneys were invited, and made no effort to avoid Richard; though he did not seek him, as before. He continued politely insistent in his attentions to Genie; but Betty devised ways to prevent these from becoming marked, and her efforts to that end were made easier because she had a co-worker in Mrs. Hardee. Frank's mamma, indeed, was almost

as watchful of Genie as was Betty, and the latter, discovering this, sighed as she thought of the infinite, constant, watchful protection thrown about the girls of the set she found herself a member of,—a sigh of relief because of Genie, a sigh of self-pity, too.

"It's a good thing I was the kind of youngster I was, Dick," she said, telling him of these things. "I had some wit in those days, some courage, some intuitions as to what the world was. God pity the girls who lack those—and are without protection!"

"Amen!" said Richard fervently. "Here we are by chance—by the favor of Banker Hall, if you please—mixing with the people who are known as the quiet set; for that's what we learn they are, now. But even here some other kind of chance lets in a bounder,—worse than bounder,—Herbert Delancy. Sure, a girl who hasn't her own kin to fight off the wolves needs God's pity and help."

This was one of the longest and most serious non-professional speeches Betty had ever

heard her husband make. She looked at him anxiously. "You've heard something!" she said.

"I got this letter," he answered.

The letter was from Delancy, politely expressing his wish to call on the Courtneys the following evening to discuss a subject of the "greatest personal interest" to him and to them.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Courtneys had schooled themselves to expect and to be prepared to meet a hostile move by Herbert Delancy. They had read his character well enough to know that he was determined; that even if he suspected that the Courtneys were preparing a counter move yet would he act. He could not have failed to become aware of the espionage he had been under in Paris by friends of Karl's; he might even be aware of the presence in this country of the priest, though Dick agreed with Karl that that was not likely. But in any event some sort of move was expected, yet the letter, which told them plainly enough that the interview Delancy asked for concerned Genie, came as a shock, in spite of all their efforts to be prepared for some such thing.

"Everything was running so smoothly, we were traveling along so fast and pleasantly

that of course we were due on a bit of rough going. You are determined to have Delancy here—not to meet him somewhere else?" Betty asked.

"Certainly we will meet him here," answered Dick. "There is to be a bit of business in that interview which I want you to see—it may please you to see it. All that I ask you to do, Sweetmeats, is to clear the stage. See that Genie is not here and that we have no one in the house except Karl's men."

As it turned out it became easy for Betty to arrange this. For the same evening on which Delancy had asked for an interview of the "greatest interest" to him and the Courtneys, the latter had accepted an invitation from the Hardees to go to the opera. This was to be Genie's first opera night, and as the party was made up it had a significance as to the relations of Genie and Frank Hardee. The senior Hardee would be absent from the city, therefore Frank would appear as the host, and Genie as his guest.

Betty, in pondering her plans, saw that to excuse herself and Dick from the engagement, yet not offer to excuse Genie at the same time would be to place an emphasis on the significance of the make-up of the party—to have Genie appear in the Hardee box as the only guest of Frank and his mother. In the absence of her own parents their friends might—certainly would—draw inferences which Betty was not willing to plan for without Mrs. Hardee's approval.

"We must never make a move which looks like a shove," Betty said to Dick as they discussed plans for clearing the house for the Delancy interview. "Mrs. Hardee might think we were playing favorites too strong if we keep out of the running but at the same time push Genie. Still, if I frankly explain to her why we want to remain at home and want Genie out of the house, she might fancy the game as it is framed."

"Your language, dear, is on the blink," commented Richard, who had been urgently

commanded to give warning when he observed Betty straying from the narrow path of polite speech to which she had devoted herself, and from which she stepped aside only unconsciously.

"It is sure to go wrong when I am all fussed up," complained Betty, too concerned with the important matter in hand to correct herself just then. "To hear me lecture Genie you'd think I was the author of Polite Phrases, but when I am seriously on the job I slip a cog now and then in my language just to ease the strain."

"All right," said Dick. "So you mean to tell Mrs. Hardee that it is my programme to rough house Herbert Delancy, and we want no family pets around the ringside when the mill is pulled off."

"No need to tell her all that," urged Betty. "I'll say that Delancy has asked for a personal interview and we think that it is best to remain at home for the purpose. Then, you see, it is up to Mrs. Hardee to change the

night of the box party or to insist upon Genie going without us. If she does insist, then it will be she who is playing favorites and not us. If she is eager to make the box party look full of meaning as to Frank and Genie I am willing."

Mrs. Hardee, when Betty placed the important question fairly before her, perfectly understood all that the situation implied and inwardly approved. She could not see, she said, why Genie, who had looked forward to the opera with so much pleasure, should be deprived of the evening's entertainment simply because her parents were obliged to forgo the delights of Wagner that night, especially as it would give her, Mrs. Hardee, an attraction for her box which it would otherwise lack; and really one must have a pretty girl in one's box, you know, or else give it to a poor relation for the evening. Mrs. Courtney understood, did she not?

Betty perfectly understood. Neither woman had ever spoken a word about a possible mar-

riage between the young people, but each knew the other's thoughts. Betty even believed that Mrs. Hardee understood pretty well why the Courtneys were eager to have Genie out of the house on the evening of Delancy's visit, though of course she could not imagine just what sort of a reception was being prepared for him. In a sense their interview amounted to a discussion of the question neither had spoken of, the possible engagement of the young couple, and Betty was more eager than ever to have the Delancy matter settled.

Genie was radiant when the Hardees called for her. Youth, beauty and the excited anticipation of a new pleasure combined suddenly to full bloom her charms, and Betty enjoyed a triumph as she gave her daughter into the care of her hosts with a parting injunction to all to return promptly for supper. Then she gave one last deft touch to Genie's toilet, and because there was no possible reason for doing so, wept just for a breath or two as

she and Richard watched the attentive Frank help his mother and Genie into the carriage.

"Genie went to some opera matinées in her school days," Betty explained to her husband as the carriage drove off, "with her hair down and her dress high and a bored governess by her side. But this is different; with her hair high and her neck maidenly décolleté, and a devoted young man by her side—it's a different act entirely. I do hope Mrs. Hardee will see that Genie's hair is not mussed up when she takes off her scarf."

Uncle Homer had returned to his farm; so when Genie departed the Courtneys were alone, except for the shadowy servants, the lithe, dark, silent men of Karl's choosing, who were as noiseless and quick in their movement as jungle cats. One of them slipped out of the areaway as the Hardee footman closed the carriage door, and like a shadow followed the carriage.

"I'm not a bit nervous, Dick," said Betty, as they waited in a small reception room; "but

I want you to promise again that there will be nothing—nothing serious. You have no weapon?"

"My dear old girl," replied Dick reassuringly, for he saw that Betty had said that she was not nervous because she was, "of course I have not a weapon. Neither will Delancy have one after he sits down here. He may have one when he comes into the house, but he will not have it when he sits down, as I have said, so it will just be man to man. I have promised myself the treat of kicking a fellow out of doors—literally kicking him out. I have been just naturally longing for that luxury ever since he tried to frighten me by showing that he knew, or suspected, that we were once the great and only Courvatels."

"He is forty pounds or more heavier than you," said Betty thoughtfully, regarding her husband in an impersonal way.

"Possibly thirty," said Dick. "Of course I shall not give him a chance to take advantage of his greater weight. The little Jap who

taught me some of those tricks which they seem just to be hearing about in this country weighed forty pounds less than I did then, but do you remember how he tossed me over his head? Lovely!"

"But why kick?" asked Betty. "Why not just get your hold—one of those the Jap taught you—and hustle him out?"

"I've doped the thing—I mean I have the programme all made out—and decided upon the literal kick because nothing else I could do to Delancy would punish him so much. He is not a coward, and has a mountain of personal pride. The kick is the thing."

Betty had only time to give a comforting glance at her husband's muscular but shapely shoulders and arms when an East Indian brought in Delancy's card, and being told to do so ushered the caller into the room. As the Indian stepped back into the hall he did not quite close the door, and standing just outside gave a sign to Dick as if indicating the caller's hip pocket. The Indian in help-

ing Delancy off with his coat had discovered what his master had instructed him to look for.

Richard bowed to Delancy, ignoring his outstretched hand, and took a step toward the door as if to close it. Delancy smiled at the affront and took a step forward, bowing to Betty, who did not rise. Richard now stood behind Delancy, between him and the door he had just entered. There was a lightning quick play of Richard's hands and, as softly as a cat plays with a feather, he had taken from Delancy's hip pocket a pistol, and handed it to the waiting servant. Then he deliberately closed the door, seated himself and motioned the caller to a chair.

Delancy seated himself, looked from one to the other of those who now watched him quietly, and seemed to consider what course to pursue in view of the nature of his reception. He determined, evidently, that this was not to be an interview which would be improved by any preparatory speeches, and with-

out a word of introduction said slowly, "I have called to ask your consent"—he paused and resumed with insolent intention—"your assistance in arranging for my marriage with your daughter."

Dick signalled to Betty to answer, for she had asked the privilege of making the first reply.

"Instead of our assistance or consent for any such purpose," said Betty, "you have our command never to speak to our daughter again."

This speech, as it was designed to, compelled Delancy to proceed at once with his main attack. He had not anticipated so sudden a call to battle and for a moment was undecided how to proceed. He had turned to Betty when she spoke; now he turned to Richard, and said, "As you had me watched from the hour I reached Paris until the hour I left,—I was not aware of it for some time, however,—I assume that you know what I went there to learn."

Richard nodded.

"What I learned there leaves me no less determined to win your daughter, no less prepared to come to a friendly understanding with you and your wife. But if what I learned was generally known among your new friends, it would end your and your children's social career; would make you despised by the colonists you have imposed upon, make you laughed at by the rest of the world. Do I overestimate the effect, Monsieur and Madame Courvatel?"

Betty was gripping the arms of her chair; but Richard was rhythmically tapping his knees with the tips of his fingers as he replied calmly:

"You lie!"

Delancy half started from his chair; then sank back, crimson with the effort to master himself, as Richard continued:

"I know every move, turn, and inquiry you made in France, and know that you learned something to confirm your belief, but that you

failed to get actual proof. If you are still curious on the point, I am willing to assure you that we are the couple who were known as Monsieur and Madame Courvatel."

"Thank you," said Delancy. "That is not information you would like to have made public?"

"Certainly not."

"Neither should I—as your son-in-law."

Delancy was losing his temper, and the more rapidly as he saw no evidence of fright or even anxiety in the faces of the others. He added, as if with a determination to rouse the others to wrath, "Neither should I want such information made public when I was enjoying the income I well know you are able to allow your daughter."

Betty winced a little at this brutal assault, but Richard continued coolly, and as if he had not heard the last remark:

"When you were in Paris you tried to find a man who, as you believed, had taught me a trick at billiards. If you could find him

you believed, that is you hoped, that you could identify me as Courvatel. You did not know that the man was dead—although you should have known it, and have known of his daughter's poverty. You knew that that man had taught someone that trick, and seeing me do it at the Country Club, you suspected that that someone would—might be—me."

Delancy smiled and bowed. He was recovering his temper, but he lost it suddenly when Dick added coolly, "You knew so much about that man's affairs because his daughter is your wife."

"She is dead!" gasped Delancy.

It was Betty who next spoke: "She is alive, happily employed, and living in this city with her uncle. She will come here now if I send for her. I know that story of desertion, and knowing it I say that you are a base and wicked man to come here for what you have!"

Delancy stared at Betty, half-stunned; but he rose as Richard did, for there was some-

thing in the manner of Courtney which warned him.

"Now that Mrs. Courtney has expressed her opinion of you," said Richard, "I'm going to express mine. I am about to kick you out of our house!"

"I warn you not to be a fool!" said Delancy savagely. "I'll take my own time to consider this absurd story you have patched up; but I am in no mind to submit to any attack."

"You must!" said Richard.

"I won't!" said Delancy, and reached his hand to his pistol pocket.

Richard enjoyed the look of dismay that came into the other's eyes as he found the pocket empty.

"I took your pistol from your pocket as you entered the room," said Richard. "A servant will give it to you on the sidewalk."

All Delancy's other emotions gave place to rage now, and as Richard stepped toward him he aimed a powerful swinging blow which

would have felled a heavier man than Richard had it reached its mark. But the man elaborately trained to judge the distance, force, direction, and speed of moving objects, as few men have been, let the blow swish within an inch of his face without attempting to stop it; on the contrary he caught the swinging arm lightly on the back with his right hand, aided its impetus, and of course turned the heavier man completely about. Then with a swift movement his right hand gripped the back of the other's collar and held him helpless. Every move Delancy made to free himself only exhausted and tortured him. Courvotel knew many devices of jiu jitsu before it became a fashion in this country.

Then Richard carried out his threat literally, through doors that were silently opened and shut; out to the very sidewalk he kicked Delancy, who moaned in mortification and helpless rage.

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"THEN RICHARD CARRIED OUT HIS THREAT LITERALLY."

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CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Herbert Delancy, with the ungentle assistance of Richard Courtney, reached the sidewalk, he was like a madman with rage. As Richard had said, Delancy was not without pride, and his humiliation was the greater because that pride was largely inspired by his own undoubted physical strength and dexterity. Richard had insulted him by word, called him a liar, and then debased him by literally kicking him out of the house, just as he had said he intended to do.

In the first frenzy of his rage he thought of returning to the house, of battering in the door; he even looked about him for something he might hurl through the windows. It was then that the servant, watching him from the shadow of the areaway, decided not to return to Delancy his pistol, as he had been ordered to do.

When some degree of composure, or rather some approach to composure, had returned to him, Delancy noticed for the first time his overcoat neatly folded, with his hat on top of it, resting on the steps. There was something in their appearance of precise propriety that turned his muttered curses into a laugh,—no more pleasant in sound,—and this helped to reduce his unreasoning tumult of purpose to something like orderly thought.

But, when it became possible for him to think, the deeper his humiliation became, the greater his rage against Courtney. He saw that a deliberate plan had been laid to humiliate him before Mrs. Courtney, that the very servants had received instructions what to do in carrying out their parts of his disgrace, as the folded coat on the steps showed. But soon Delancy began to think of how thoroughly he had been trapped in another and even more serious respect. The Courtneys had discovered his marriage with the French girl, had

even found the girl and had won her to their services to degrade him further if necessary. He really had had some slight reason to believe that the wife he had abandoned was dead and had readily accepted the fact as proved. Probably Courtney knew more: knew that he, Delancy, had been the girl's father's accomplice in some questionable gambling transactions. He could not tell what that man Karl might have discovered about him.

He was sobered enough now to know that with all these possibilities threatening him he was no longer in a position to threaten Courtney. But there was revenge left. To disclose Courtney's former life to the colonists would not be to inflict upon him keen enough suffering. And with all the facts known his disclosures would be discredited. Virginia! Through her was the way to strike. He knew that she was at the opera with the Hardees. Some sort of a half-formed plan made him hastily go to his apartment, remove all signs

of disorder, and arrange as well as his turbulent mind would permit the details of his suddenly formed plan of revenge.

The event which had so aroused rage and hate in the mind of Delancy had an opposite effect on the minds of the others involved. Betty had followed Dick to the door and when she returned with him to the parlor she threw her arms around his neck and exclaimed, "Old fellow, I never saw you do a trick which gave me so much pleasure. It was grand! No, I am not going to cry; I am a little bit on the edge of my foot, I admit, but it is with delight. I think before the opera folks return we might treat ourselves to a little—eh?—something nice to allay the dust of battle and sudden exit. Eh?"

"Well," admitted Dick, "it was a very satisfactory performance. As soon as I got my hold on him of course he could do nothing that I did not want him to do, for I used the Jap's trick of making all his exertions count against himself. It worked like a mouse.

That aside of yours about something to drink fits in all right with my ideas of the occasion—hello, Karl is on the job."

Karl entered with a bottle of champagne and three glasses. Sometimes when they were alone Karl himself relaxed the self-imposed discipline of a steward, and quietly restored himself to the status of an old friend.

"It was well done, Richard," he said, filling the glasses. "He is a powerful man, but he was like a child in your hands. I think he will try to make trouble, but I shall let him know in the morning that I have a record of his life in Paris and know of his dealings with Mr. Van Alostine, which I will use if he does not leave the country quietly. You are still excited, Elizabeth; take a little of the champagne."

Betty sipped from her glass and then looked whimsically from one man to the other.

"I am thinking," she said, "of the days in the Far East when we three would hold a

council of economy, to decide if we could afford one bottle of beer to be divided between the three of us."

"It was a rare treat when we got it," Karl said with a smile.

"It was warm, stale, and expensive," Dick said, "while this is cool, fresh and—comparing incomes then and now—inexpensive. Here's to old times and new times, including the time when we have Karl installed as a professor of some of his learned do-dads."

Chatting of old times, planning for Karl's future, the hours passed so pleasantly that Betty was nearly restored to her accustomed calmness when they heard the Hardee carriage stop in the street. Karl, instantly restoring himself to his customary place, withdrew with the signs of their treat and went to order the promised supper for the opera-goers.

Mrs. Hardee entered hastily, saw Betty and her husband rise to greet her, smiling and calm, and then all but fainted.

"Where is Genie?" cried Betty in a sudden panic.

"Mr. Delancy came to the box!" gasped Mrs. Hardee. "Said you were very ill! Genie went with him in an automobile to come to you!"

This appalling information was more than Betty's already strained nerves could endure, and she fainted. Richard, leaving his wife to Mrs. Hardee's ministrations, hurriedly called Karl to the hall, and learned from him that one of the servants had followed the Hardee carriage when it left the house, but had not yet returned, nor had any word been received from him.

"The man could easily follow a carriage on foot," said Richard, thinking aloud; "but Delancy took Genie away from the opera house in an automobile. If he found a clear road to speed the car on, the man would not be able to follow."

Karl already had one of his men by his side, preparing to leave the house, and he called a

second, and then a third, giving them quick instructions, which they received quietly and then as quietly departed.

"Go to your wife, sir," said Karl to Richard at last. "I will take this man with me. He will do what I tell him to do,—whatever it may be."

When Richard returned to his wife he found that she was restored from her faint; apparently self-restored by a struggling sense that she must be prepared to help, to do something, but she nearly lost her senses again as she listened to Mrs. Hardee, and realized in what a desperate adventure of a reckless and vengeful man Genie was involved. Her husband was able to suggest some comforting thought.

He told her that the man who had followed the Hardee carriage at Karl's command was yet to be heard from, and gave her Karl's assurance that the man was one who had the wit and courage to aid Genie when he saw that she was in need of aid. Karl had se-

lected him for his duty because of his good sense, his daring and ingenuity. Also, the young Hindu knew Delancy well by sight, and knew enough of the work Karl had been doing to be suspicious of him. As he had not returned with the Hardee carriage, he was probably following Delancy's automobile.

"But the car might travel too fast!" moaned Betty.

"Then the man would have returned and reported," assured Richard.

"I can't stay here doing nothing!" interrupted Frank Hardee. "Tell me something I can do, some place I can go! I can get a car and go over the route between here and the opera house. There may have been an accident."

"Do that," said Richard, seeing that it would be a kindness to the young man to give him some employment. "I will make as fast a trip as I can to all the garages he could have visited."

He turned to Betty. "Karl is out with all

his people. We will wait to hear from him before taking in the police."

"The police and a scandal!" groaned Mrs. Hardee.

CHAPTER XV

HERBERT DELANCY, as has been told, went from the Courtneys' house to his apartment to remove all signs of his humiliating struggle with Dick, and to decide upon the details of the plan he had hastily formed for revenge.

From his apartment Delancy went to a garage near by where he was known as a patron and selected a car with which he was familiar, two seated, half enclosed and having a trunk shelf on the rear. He explained that he would not take a driver as the party he was to take for a little run would require all the seats. He would telephone for a driver, he said, when he was through with the machine.

At the Opera House traffic officers were keeping the driveway clear in front of the side entrance when Delancy arrived there.

Delancy explained to one in command that he would be out directly with a lady, so his car was allowed to remain in front of the entrance.

Among the seemingly idle and curious who were kept at some distance from the entrance by the police was one quietly watchful man; a dark-featured, plainly dressed person, a foreigner, but not more conspicuously foreign than other idlers of the night. This man showed a quick interest in the arrival of Delancy, and tried to draw near enough to overhear what he said to the police. He caught some of the words, and then crossed the street to the shadow of a doorway, where he kept his eyes fixed on all that went on. He was the man, a Hindu, whom the cautious Karl had assigned to follow the Hardees' carriage and who had received some specific instructions as to the very man he had just seen entering the Opera House.

Delancy knew the location of the Hardee box, and went briskly to the lobby door; but

there he paused a minute to collect himself, and as if to rehearse his plan. Then he stepped in. He looked so haggard as a result of his experiences, that Mrs. Hardee, who looked up curiously to see who should enter the box during an act, rose apprehensively and stepped toward him. Delancy placed a finger to his lips, as if warning her not to ask the question he saw in her eyes, and stepped back into the ante-room, where she, now alarmed, followed him.

"Mrs. Courtney is suddenly and, I fear, seriously ill," he said, "and Courtney asked me to come here for Miss Courtney. Mrs. Courtney has asked for her daughter, and I think she should go at once."

Mrs. Hardee, shocked, utterly deceived by the man's real agitation, and accepting it as evidence of the seriousness of the reason for his visit, whispered, "We will leave at once! Will you see about our carriage? Oh! how can I tell Virginia?"

Virginia had seen Delancy enter, but was

so engrossed with the music that she did not notice anything unusual in his appearance,—in truth, was not more than half conscious of him. But she turned as Delancy and Mrs. Hardee re-entered the box, and then something in the latter's looks frightened the girl, and she rose to her feet as she asked, "What is it, Mrs. Hardee?"

It was Delancy who replied, saying, "Your mother is ill; only slightly, we hope, but it is better for you to return at once." He already had Virginia's wrap in his hands.

"Mrs. Hardee will follow us," he continued. "We'll not wait for her carriage, as I have an automobile at the entrance."

At a little sign of dissent from this plan which Mrs. Hardee gave, he added, "It will take a few minutes to get your carriage," he lowered his voice, "and there should be no delay."

While he spoke he placed Virginia's wrap around her, and even as she was confusedly asking Mrs. Hardee to tell her more of any,

message her mother had sent, Delancy was leading her away.

During the entire interview Delancy had never once let his eyes meet those of Frank Hardee, though that young man had eyed Delancy keenly.

The instant Delancy had left the box, Frank was placing his mother's wrap over her shoulders and hastily gathering various belongings which he carried in his arms without stopping to put on his own overcoat.

"We must hurry, mother," he said.

"Yes," she replied, her voice trembling with nervous fright at something in her son's voice. "I could not very well help Delancy taking her away. But we shall be directly after them."

"Hurry, and we may overtake them," said Frank.

Delancy spoke in tones of comforting assurance to Virginia as he hurried her out of the Opera House. "There is nothing, I believe, to be alarmed about," he said. "Your

father naturally wanted you to be at your mother's side. Fortunately I was there, and offered to bring you at once in my car. I am certain we shall find your mother much better."

He helped the trembling girl into the back seat, saying, "We shall have to take a round-about way home,—streets torn up,—but we shall not be long." Then he took the driver's seat, and the car moved off, slowly at first, as the shifting carriages, gathering for their owners, half blocked the street.

From the shadow of a doorway opposite the entrance the interesting dark man emerged so quietly that he might have been part of the shadow which had concealed him, followed the car round the corner, and then, as its pace became greater, lightly jumped to the baggage platform, where he crouched like an animal.

The car first turned in a general direction toward home; but after traveling northward nearly to the park, turned to the west. It had passed the last avenue that would have led even in a general direction toward the Van Alostine residence, which the Courtneys occu-

pied, when Virginia called out sharply, "Where are we going, Mr. Delancy?"

"There is another physician your father wished me to pick up, only a little way down here."

The man behind drew something from his belt which glittered as they flashed past electric lights.

The next turn was to the south, down an avenue not much traveled at night.

"I want to go home at once, Mr. Delancy!" Virginia cried; but there was no other answer to this than an extra burst of speed.

At this Virginia cried out, "Stop at once, or I shall jump out!"

Then the man on the baggage platform leaned over, saw a cab approaching slowly, returning from a trip with passengers to some ferry landing, and sharply the glittering thing he held in his hand was pressed on a tire of the speeding car. There was an explosion, the deflated tire let the rim of the wheel grind on the pavement, and the car came to a jolting stop.

Delancy jumped from his seat, but found at the runboard a man who, swifter than he, sprang from the rear. He was already helping Virginia from the car, and, as Delancy stepped toward him menacingly, the man quietly displayed the knife with which he had cut the tire. The cab was opposite them now, and the man said, opening the door of the cab, which stopped at his signal, "Get in here, Miss Courtney!"

Virginia was almost in a faint with fright; but her glance at the man who spoke to her showed her the calmly smiling face of a house servant, and with a gasp of relief she obeyed him. The man jumped on the box, gave the driver an address and the cab rolled away.

All this had taken but a few seconds of time. The cabman had asked for no explanations, for the transfer had seemed the result of an ordinary accident, and Delancy himself scarcely realized what was taking place before it was all over.

CHAPTER XVI

WE can most easily follow the events of that night by returning to the Courtneys', where, as we have seen, Richard, and Frank Hardee, arranged to go out into the night, following Karl, in search of the lost Genie.

Frank Hardee was the first to leave the house, but even as he opened the street door the others heard him give a joyful shout which took them all into the hall with a rush. In another moment Frank, with his arm around Virginia's waist, half carried her up the steps to the door where she was absorbed into her mother's arms.

"Karl told me that you were all right, mother," the girl said, as soon as she had been sufficiently embraced by her father and Mrs. Hardee.

"Karl!" exclaimed Dick, seeing signs of another emotional relapse in Betty. "Karl is a genius, but he is not here to serve us supper—nor is there a servant in the house."

He sought to divert Betty's mind from its apparent inclination to lose itself again.

"If your mother were the same amiable lady I have known for some time she would remember that there is a nice little gentlemanly supper waiting somewhere around the shack" (Mrs. Hardee gave him a glance of approval for the restoring word) "and that all it needs to do its proper turn, is for someone to set it forth. I'll do my share, if Frank cannot do it, by opening any small bottles Karl may have provided for us."

Part of this speech was a cipher affectionate appeal to Betty to "brace up," and part was a design to arouse her instinct of hostess, and together they effected their object.

Soon the delayed supper was served and Genie was telling her story, Dick muttering under his breath, even as he appeared calm, "Karl will find him for me!"

So we may safely leave the supper party to follow Karl.

When, with his companion, he started out on his search it was Karl's purpose to go first to the Opera House in the hope of there picking up some clue, the beginning of his trail, from the police or some idler who might have noticed the Hindu follow Delancy. That the man would follow he knew well, but Karl had hurried only a few blocks on his way when he was hailed by the Hindu from the box of a cab. Karl at once discovered that Virginia was the cab's passenger, and he quietly assured her that her mother was well, and sought to assure her that her experience was only the result of a misunderstanding. He even suggested to her to make as light of it as she could to her mother. Then, speaking in the Hindu's native language, he briefly gave him an order and listened to his story, after which he directed the cabman to hurry to the Courtney home.

"Now," said Karl to his companion, as they hurried on, "you were as wise as a ser-

pent to have duplicate keys made of Mr. Delancy's apartment. We will go there at once."

When they reached the house Karl opened the outer door with a key, and calmly walked to a floor above, where another key admitted them to Delancy's rooms. There Karl turned up a light and looked around.

"He has hastily dressed since he left our house by Courtney's aid," he said to his companion. "He will probably return here, because he will suppose that we would look for him almost anywhere else, first. Also, whatever his plans, wherever he may decide to go—for he is certain to try to hide for a time—he must change from evening dress. We will wait."

He turned down the light.

When the cab with Virginia inside and the Hindu on the box quickly disappeared from the scene of what to the few curious onlookers seemed like a familiar automobile accident, Delancy lost no time in leaving the scene. With

the aid of a policeman he rolled the disabled car to the curb, telephoned to the garage to send for it, and then hastily departed from the neighborhood.

He would have to leave town for a few days at least, for he felt certain that Courtney would seek him with the aid of those silent men who, he now realized, had shadowed him for many months.

And, as Karl had divined would be the course of Delancy's reasoning, he imagined pursuers seeking him at garages, at railroad stations, steamship wharfs, his clubs, at any of his known resorts—anywhere but at his own apartment. He decided to go there at once, for he must change his dress and get his baggage.

He was very cautious, however, as he approached his apartment. He made certain that no watchers lurked in any doorways near by, and saw that the lights in his rooms were just as he had left them. All his observations strengthening his own judgment,

he entered the house, mounted the one flight of stairs, unlocked the door to his sitting-room, walked half across the room to raise the lights. Then he heard a movement behind him, turned, and saw Karl locking the door.

"I thought you would come soon," said Karl.

Delancy slowly turned his gaze from Karl to the Malay, then sank into a chair with a look half of fatigue, half of hopelessness. He did not appear to be angry, and when his expression did change, it was to one of expectant wonder.

He had just been thwarted in a desperate enterprise undertaken chiefly to revenge the insults and humiliation Richard Courtney had subjected him to; but his first purpose of revenge had been joined by a thought that at the same time he might win from Virginia the consent her parents had denied with such hurt to his pride. At first the purpose to induce Virginia to leave the Opera House with him alone went no further than the hope to turn

the adventure to the advantage of his desire for revenge. He could, he believed, in the desperate whirl of his resentful thoughts, compromise the girl in the eyes of the world. That would serve his revenge.

But when he reached the Hardees' box and saw Virginia, his mood and purpose changed. All the love he was capable of feeling was aroused by sight of the girl, more beautiful than he had ever before seen her. The thought came to him, and it seemed to suggest a probability, insane as it really was, that if he could have her with him alone long enough to plead his suit he could win her consent to go with him. For a moment he even lost sight of his purpose of revenge, and all his instincts were aroused to the one hope that he might gain Virginia freely; that if she would listen to him she must believe in him—consent to go with him. But where?

He knew that one of the German line boats sailed the next morning; and when, by the story of her mother's illness he had succeeded

in inducing Virginia to leave the Opera House alone with him, the wild plan of getting her across the river, and as far as the pier of the boat, suggested itself to further this second plan. He could not think in details: only that if the young woman, distressed by the false news of her mother's serious illness, and with but little knowledge of the city's streets, gave no alarm until the ferry was reached, he could somehow carry through his plan, and gain her consent to an elopement.

The sudden interruption of his journey, Virginia's quick disappearance by means Delancy even yet did not understand,—he did not know that the Hindu had slashed the tire with a knife,—brought to his confused mind some sense of the enormity of the crime he had attempted. This had given sudden pause to his whirling thoughts, somewhat as the accident to the motor car had brought its whirling machinery to a sudden stop. There was something fearsome, too, in the mysterious appearance by the side of the disabled car of that

quiet Hindu which shook Delancy's nerves. He recalled how often, both in Paris and here, he had been shadowed by one of those softly-treading, patient men who seemed to spring up out of the very pavement as allies of the Courtneys.

In short, Herbert Delancy was more nervously and mentally benumbed, when, after a careful inspection of the windows from the street, he entered his rooms, than he had ever before been in his life. So, as he raised the light and turned at the sound of his own door being locked behind him, it was with a strange sense of helplessness that he sank into a chair, half-consciously wondering at himself that he felt no anger at the intruders.

Both Karl and his Malay companion fixed their eyes intently upon Delancy, observing the languor, rather than anger, his look expressed, and noting his physical lassitude. Then they exchanged quick, satisfied glances. "Well?" said Delancy, after a silence neither of the others seemed disposed to interrupt.

"Of course you know," began Karl, in a voice rather sympathetic than reproachful, "that if you are in New York to-morrow Richard Courtney will try to kill you."

Karl's utterance was soft and monotonous, and Delancy seemed to hear it as at a distance. But this did not surprise him so much as did his interest in Karl's eyes. They were compelling. He could not take his own from them; nor did he wish to, for his tired brain and nerves seemed to find rest in their glance.

"As you are good enough to warn me," replied Delancy, quietly enough, "I'll try to take care of myself."

"As to that," responded Karl, reassuringly, "I, myself, would prevent Mr. Courtney from harming you, if it were necessary. I have five or six old friends about me—this is one—who would make it unnecessary for anyone else to—to—— You understand? They are all, as it happens, under obligations to me for favors such as even a poor man can render sometimes."

"You mean, I suppose," said Delancy, and he even smiled as he spoke, "that your interesting friends are so little averse to using the knife that at a hint from you they would save Mr. Courtney the trouble of looking for me?"

His nerves were steadier now. Karl's voice was so gentle, even soothing, as to give the impression to Delancy that his unbidden visitors were not unfriendly in the purpose of their call, after all.

"If you care to put it like that," answered Karl, "I shall not trouble you with explanations, as the hour is late and you are tired."

Delancy smiled and bowed as if acknowledging the other's politeness. This steward of the Courtneys was a strange fellow; spoke almost like a gentleman. He recalled hearing some gossip at the colony that Karl was, in fact, a scholar. Certainly he had agreeable manners, and there was something fascinating about his eyes. Delancy leaned forward to listen more intently, as Karl resumed:

"The point is this: You must leave this

country at once,—a steamer sails in the morning,—because I wish to spare you trouble, and myself annoyance. It would be an annoyance to have to arrange the escape of the man who believed his obligation to me required that he—you understand?—should dispose of you.”

The pleasant tone in Karl's voice had not departed; yet he had plainly threatened Delancy's life if he did not leave the country at once. Delancy thought of this, and then began to think of an emphasis, slight, but full of meaning, Karl had placed on the word “must.” After a pause of some seconds Delancy said:

“Of course I am not frightened at your mysterious threats, but the fact is I had half a notion of sailing to-morrow.”

“Make it a whole notion,” suggested Karl, persuasively. “My friend here will help you to pack.”

He spoke in a strange language to the Malay, who, without surprise, rose, approached Delancy, and held out his hand.

"He wants your trunk keys," explained Karl.

Delancy, under an influence he could no more resist than he could explain, tossed a bunch of keys to the Malay, who opened trunks and wardrobes and proceeded to pack as for a master he had served for years.

Karl continued in the same voice, and Delancy vaguely wondered if the calm monotony of the voice or something in Karl's eyes, which never lost their hold on his, had to do with that influence, "My friend here has my orders to pack such things as will accommodate you until I shall have shipped all your belongings to you."

"All my belongings where? What are you talking about?" Delancy asked this with an intention to show indignation at such presumption; but he was dreamily aware that he had uttered the question with almost childish inconsequence.

"You are never to return to this country again," said Karl. "So I will look after all

that you leave here, and forward all that you may not wish me to dispose of."

"Oh, come!" said Delancy. "This is running into farce."

He half rose, but at a sign from Karl the Malay placed a single finger against Delancy's chest and gently pushed him back into the chair. Delancy did not resist, nor did he think it strange that his temples were swiftly swept three or four times by the Malay's hands.

Karl rose now, and going close to Delancy placed his hands on his shoulders and by his own fixed gaze steadied the other's wavering eyes. "You are not to come back here, because I know all the reasons Mr. Van Alostine could give to the law officers for sending you to prison. A good, a gentle, a kind man, Mr. Van Alostine, one only a very treacherous person would betray."

Karl paused, but noting a slight look of dissent in the other's eyes, he continued:

"Mr. Van Alostine learned that I had some useless knowledge—useless to me—on a sub-

ject he wished information about. His son-in-law had sent him photographs of inscriptions on a new—ah, a very rich, important!—excavation discovery, and I was able to transcribe it for him. You understand? It brought us into the relation of gentleman and gentleman. On the other hand, he knew something I wanted to know. It related to you. A sensitive man, he is. I know now. A man who might be placed under an influence which would compel him to obey my will. Pay strict attention, Herbert Delancy! If you ever return to this country, I will send you to prison! Mr. Van Alostine must testify, because he—cannot—refuse—if—I—ask.”

Delancy slowly nodded his head as if showing that he understood.

“Say aloud that you understand!” suddenly commanded Karl.

“I understand,” said Delancy.

Karl, with a slight smile, turned to the Malay, who was locking and strapping a steamer trunk. He told the man that he would go for

a carriage. "The beast is asleep," he added, though Delancy, to whom he referred, was now taking wide-eyed but impersonal interest in the Malay's actions.

It was chill, sunless daylight when a carriage deposited Delancy, Karl, and the Malay on a pier in Hoboken. But early as it was the pier was awake and bustling with the last busy preparation for a sailing. Most of the few cabin passengers had avoided an early morning call in New York by crossing over during the night and sleeping on board. But there were hundreds of steerage passengers, some leaning over the side of the ship, some still noisily bidding good-bye to fellow-countrymen on the pier.

The scene was familiar to Delancy, and he accepted it as a matter of course that he should be there; that Karl should accompany him on board, seek the purser for a cabin assignment, and go with him to the cabin.

"My friend and I will remain on board until the last 'All ashore!' signal," said Karl;

"but we shall leave you alone if you want to lie down. I think you'd better lie down and go to sleep."

"I should like to lie down and go to sleep," answered Delancy with docility.

Even as the last warning sounds of the signal were heard, Karl looked in at Delancy, deep in sleep, and only then quit the ship.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Karl saw the steamer slowly draw out into the river with one passenger aboard in a deep hypnotic sleep, he quietly returned home in no manner elated with his victory; even more troubled in heart than he had been during his mental struggle with Delancy, for he knew he had another and even harder struggle before him with Richard Courtney.

He found Betty and Dick dressed for the morning, though he saw that they had not slept nor sought sleep, but had waited for him and his report. He told them of the night's strange adventure, and they were not surprised at the power he had exerted over Delancy, for they had, in the old days, seen evidence of that. Then came the struggle: Richard said that he would follow Delancy and have his own personal settlement with

him. Then Betty's eyes appealed to Karl for help.

"I have advised with you before now, Richard," he said to him, "advised with you when we had to look forward to desperate chances, and events proved that I was right. Is it so?"

"It is so," Dick said, calmly, and then added hotly, "but this is different. Can I rest under this? Am I not to have the satisfaction of facing that brute once more and measuring my strength with his until one of us is no more a man! Think of what he had in his mind to do! Do you ask me to let him think I am a coward?"

"He knows that you are no coward, Richard," answered Karl, quietly. "But would it not be cowardly for you to do that which would injure Elizabeth—Virginia? You never were much of a philosopher"—Karl smiled faintly at some recollections—"but you never lacked in good sense when I have been able to show you in what direction good sense lay.

You have followed my advice, as I said, when we faced desperate chances, and events proved me to be right.

"So. Now we are facing no chance, only trying to overlook a disagreeable happening in the past; and you must listen to me now as you have in other times. All that you have gained in the world is securer to you now than ever before; and all that you have gained in the world you would jeopardize if you persisted in this foolish wish to follow Delancy. He will never return. He may not long remain under the influence of the suggestion I was able to impose upon him in his abnormal mental condition. We do not know much of such conditions. The Malay is an adept, and helped me. But he knows no more of how his power was exerted, how long it will last, than do I, than do any of us who exert such power. But if the potency of the suggestion wears away, as it may, Delancy will yet be afraid of what I know about him. He will not return. If you pursue him, and kill

or maim him, as you want to, the world will scent the affair, distort it into a scandal, magnify and lie about it. Think of the unhappiness that it would bring to Elizabeth, to Virginia! Is your wish for mere physical revenge worth such a price—the price of Elizabeth's unhappiness?"

Thus Richard was persuaded; not wholly then, but Karl persisted in his advice, noting, as he saw the need of so doing, the interesting evidence concerning human nature that it was Richard who suffered most from Delancy's evil attempt. In the weeks which followed Betty seemed as if she might have forgotten the whole matter had it not been for anxiety about Dick. Virginia had suffered only a brief fright at worst, and from that youth is not slow to recover. She never realized what were the motives prompting Delancy's act, and Betty purposely talked but little with her about the adventure. When she did it was only to make as little of it as might be as a drunken man's escapade. At worst it could

have resulted only in Virginia's having to hail a policeman; but even that necessity was spared to her, because her father always had her protected by one of Karl's men. It was a rowdy act on Delancy's part; he would never be seen again; and it was to be forgotten. And, as to any effect on the girl's blithe spirits, it was forgotten.

Noting this, and gradually coming under the influence of Karl's views of the matter, Richard, too, regained his calmness and good spirits; and as that wonderful winter in town wore on there came such serenity in the Courtney household that Karl declared at last that he would have to take up the study of a new group of languages for excitement.

Yet with Delancy out of mind, with the best of the colonists in town, entertaining and being entertained by the Courtneys, there was one thing that troubled Betty and her most intimate colonial friend, Mrs. Hardee. Frank Hardee was wholly in love with Virginia, but he had never proposed for her hand, and one

of the mothers knew that he was running a dangerous chance by his delay.

Count Serristori was the cause of the trouble.

"The Count is all right as a Count," said Betty to Richard, telling him of some of the confidences that had passed between her and Mrs. Hardee on the subject. "The Van Alostines met him in the South through the Italian Ambassador, and they would never have given him their rain checks if they had not learned that he was to the good socially. So we who got their meal tickets—I mean their letters of introduction—are not taking a chance on a gold brick. As to that, he is to the good; but the trouble is that he is a Count."

"You don't think that Virginia would ever think of marrying a foreigner!" exclaimed Dick.

"Of course she wouldn't!" asserted Betty, confidently. "But our daughter, strange as it may seem to you, is a woman. Now, the Count is easy to look at; he is courted; he has

a whole box of cunning little conversational tricks our men haven't got in their props; he dances like a front row extra girl, and sings like a comic opera tenor who's been drafted out of a swell church choir."

"Not much to put him strong with me!" snorted Richard.

"To be sure not," assented Betty; "but, as I was saying, Virginia is a woman, and her dad is not. Well, Dicky, the second motive in my little playlet is now about to unfold itself to your admiring glances. The most absurd stories are floating around the picnic grounds about the size of our roll."

"Should say so!" remarked Richard. "I've been asked to go on the boards of two banks. Shouldn't wonder if I was asked to run for the Senate."

"Well," continued Betty, "the Count has heard these stories that we have boodle buried in bulk, and that Uncle Homer is going to give Virginia a few scattering millions, for her dot, just to show that he is a good fellow."

"Now, look here, Betty," interrupted Dick, "if you don't bring this scenario around to where Frank Hardee makes his entrance, I'll declare the show rotten and go out to see a man."

"Easy! The Count has made a quick-firing battery charge on our little girl, and because she doesn't shoo him away Frank Hardee is up stage, and, of course, the more he is up stage the more Virginia is at leisure for the Count to do his conversation turn with her. I think she is in love with Frank; but she is that sort of person that if the man she loves shows any disposition to get chilly around his Trilbys——"

"Count Serristori!" announced a servant, entering with a card.

Betty had been so much annoyed by the interference of the Count in the smooth progress of the affair between Frank and Genie that she would have shown some signs of her disesteem of him when he now entered the room, had not the action of her husband

changed her mind to a willingness to help Dick along in a programme of fun which she saw he had decided upon.

The room where they received the Count, the one they called the "little" reception room on the second floor, was flooded with the light of a low but bright early spring sun. As the Count entered he stood for a moment where a broad, honest ray of sunshine fell full on his face. What that searchlight revealed Dick saw first, and instantly signalled his discovery to Betty. The Count's cheeks were delicately rouged, his eyebrows penciled, and there was a faint flush of carmine on his lips, parted in an eager smile.

Dick jumped to his feet, grasped the Count's hand with hearty vigor, pulled a chair full into the sunshine, and without any gentleness forced the caller to be seated where the telltale light displayed art's aid to his beauty in its best advantage.

"Gol derned glad fer to meet you!" said Dick. "Had the honor of meetin' your dad in

Paris when you must a-been no higher than a grasshopper. Knew your old man well. Had no idee I'd ever have the honor of greetin' his kid in my own home."

As a matter of fact, Dick had met the elder Count Serristori, and played cards with that impoverished nobleman in one of the brilliant but vagrant periods when Monsieur Courvatel was not traveling as a professional sleight-of-hand artist, yet when his travels were not without profit. But, no matter. He had won from the old Count, who had not paid. That was a detail.

The little visitor actually blinked at the heartiness of the welcome, the sudden knowledge that this brusque host knew his father, and blinked again at the staring sunlight. He would have liked to change his seat, but in some marvelously rapid movement Dick had arranged the unoccupied chairs so that the Count could not change easily.

Betty, the merriest woman who ever helped along a harmless joke, was sympathetically

informed of the situation as Dick saw it. He had signalled some things to her by rapid cipher, and all else that she needed to know she knew intuitively. She added her own effusive greetings, and for Dick's benefit drew her fingers over her face as if using a make-up pencil in a stage dressing-room.

"Right you are, old girl!" said Dick joyously, and when the Count stared at these strange words Dick said to him confidentially, "You savvy we Amer'cans get so all fired chummy with our wives, struggling along together, that we use strange pet names. Don't you shy if Mrs. Courtney happens to call me Old Sport, or Muggins. Now, son, what kin we do for you?"

"Yes, what kin we do for you?" repeated Betty, with a manner of almost breathless interest. "I was saying to Old Sport that you'd forgot to make your dinner call; but I reckoned that you'd make it some old day when you hadn't much else on your mind."

"Hush, ma!" exclaimed Dick, reproach-

fully. "How could he have much else on his mind? I says to ma, I says, that the Count would make his call as soon as he finished investigatin' our financial standing," Dick rattled on. "Laws! my banker tells me he is nigh pestered to death with the inquiries your lawyer has set on foot."

"But sakes alive!" exclaimed Betty, taking her cue, and not noticing the Count's amazement, "I says to Muggins, I says, 'Muggins,' I says, 'if the Count would only come slapbang to us, and ask us what we was wu'th, we'd tell him as quick as shootin'!'"

"And so," said Dick, snapping up the line when Betty stopped for breath, "right out with it! We are plain business folks. What'll you sell for?"

"Yes, what's your askin' price?" added Betty.

"My price?" repeated the Count. He was swelling with delight as he thought he saw himself not only bid for,—for he expected that,—but also saved the trouble of pretending

to be a suitor for these vulgarians' daughter, instead of their money.

"Sure, Mike!" exclaimed Dick. "No use business folks beating the devil around the bush in a dicker like this. What's your title wu'th?"

"What do you demand, cash down?" asked Betty, as the Count paused to consider. "Suppose we say five hundred dollars, and call it a swap."

"Five hundred dollars!" almost shrieked the Count. "You must think I am an imbecile!"

"No, no, dear Mr. Count," pleaded Dick. "Don't go for to accuse us of only *thinkin'* you are an imbecile. We are cute enough to *know* that. Now, there's a heap of spending in five hundred plunks. You know that divorces come easy, and the gal's folks always pay for them; so you could repeat the deal once a year. That sort of makes an annual income of it. I know lots of Counts who put up quite a front on less than five hundred a

year. But we ain't stingy if we are comfortably fixed. What do you say to seven hundred and fifty?"

"Seven hundred and fifty piffles!" exclaimed the Count. "You say let us talk business. So I say. Very well. You want a title. Ah, believe me, I know what they are worth in this market. Do you not think we hear the reports of the prices paid? Now listen to me well! I will agree to a marriage for one million dollars, deposited in my bank in Paris."

"Dear me, dear me!" wailed Dick. "That's a powerful sight o' boodle! In your bank, you say?"

"In my bank, to my personal credit, without any American strings on it," replied the Count sternly.

"Your bank, eh? I wonder if that is the same bank your father drew some checks on to pay me a debt of honor. The checks was no good."

"Perhaps the Count will cash them—on ac-

count," suggested Betty, covering her eyes with her handkerchief.

"This is a farce!" shouted the Count, jumping to his feet. "You think to secure a Count for the price of a supper,—the price a Count pays for a supper after he marries an American. No! If you want a title for your daughter——"

"Whoa, Bill! Steady there!" interrupted Dick. "I have not mentioned my daughter's name, and I advise you not to, either!"

The Count smiled frankly. "Of course it is no affair of hers," he said. "Naturally, she is not to be considered. Now you speak sensibly. Leaving her out of the bargain, we can proceed, as you say, like business people."

"Yes, we'll leave her out," said Dick. "I'll explain: Mrs. Courtney's maid—good sort, but will read the yellow journals—wants a title—confesses it herself. So we thought if they were going cheap, we'd please the woman. We'll give you seven hundred and fifty to

marry Mrs. Courtney's maid—if she will have you.”

“You insult me!” cried the Count. “A friend will call on you to-morrow.”

“No, no, son,” said Dick soothingly, “it isn't so bad as all that. You needn't send a friend to tell me what a nice chap you are. I know all about you. Your family is all right, so far as the title and age can make it all right; but your family, including you, are a penniless, feeble, gambling lot, broken in health, morals, and pockets. The Ambassador introduced you just as he would introduce a bad brand of wine, to help an old friend. I've been in your neck of woods; I know that things are considered differently there.

“This trip of yours over here is financed by some of your family's creditors—I happen to know about it: steward of mine happens to have an old friend in Paris. If you marry a rich American girl, your creditors get paid; if you lose—well, they have taken a gamble on the proposition.

"If Mr. and Mrs. Van Alostine knew as much about you as I do, they would not have given you the letters they did. As it happens, you got into the wrong set here. Tackle another set: you may win. Even then you do not have to make up your face. The fact that without your make-up you will show as a ghastly, absinthe-poisoned, anæmic little thing, won't hurt your chances of winning a bride in the set where they like to buy titles. Take my word for it, son."

As Dick had talked the Count had made two or three futile efforts to interrupt him, which the speaker ignored. As Dick finished, the Count burst into a rage of tears which kept him from speaking.

"Don't cry, sonny!" said Betty, whose tender heart was touched with pity for the wretched little fellow, seeing that Dick's truthful picture of him had more than enraged the Count,—had staggered him with shame. "Don't cry. We only wanted to punish you a little for presuming to think that

you could win a sensible girl. You are not so much to blame; for, of course, you have heard of the set where the women would throw themselves and their daughters at you. But not our set! Now, run along to your hotel, scrub your face well with soap and hot water, and make a fresh start. If you have no luck, and go completely broke and need funds to get home with, let us know."

Betty's kindly voice, and the sympathy she showed she felt for his misery, wholly upset the little man's feelings; his tears were no longer of rage, but of humiliation.

"Come, come, brace up, old chap!" said Dick, heartily.

He looked keenly at the Count, then at Betty, and added, "See here, you look to me like a mugger whose company has not paid salaries and has disbanded on the road a long way from the Bowery. Do you need a little cash?"

Now the poor fellow broke down completely. He had spent all the funds the syn-

dicate that was backing his wife-hunt would advance, was in debt to his hotel, and utterly miserable.

The next day Karl, wooden-faced as usual, arranged the Count's affairs, and gave him a ticket home, with some spending money.

"We owed him that much for stringing him as we did," said Dick to Betty.

"Yes," she replied. "While Genie, the little rascal, was, of course, using the Count as the most convenient weapon at hand to punish Frank Hardee with, for being a faint heart, I am glad to have the Count out of the country. We don't want that sort of microbe floating around our set."

CHAPTER XVIII

SOON after the closing of the Count Seristori incident the Courtneys and the Hardees returned to the country, first of the colonists. The winter had been a long and exciting social campaign for Betty, who was more than satisfied with results, but she felt the need of some quiet weeks for rest and reflection before the summer campaign came again to tax her wit and strength. And Dick, who had taken up pigs as a practical means to help Betty in her campaign, had seriously fallen under the charm of their care and breeding. He wanted much to resume his work on the farm.

"Tell you what it is, Betty," he said, "I'm top-lining myself in my own opinion by my little box of pork tricks. I figured it all out by my lonely that I would make a hit with the aristocrats by paying a proper attention

to pigs, and the turn has gone like a season-long success. This particular set we have taken under our wings are pushing the useful occupation idea as opposed to the wholly idle life of some of the other sets. So I said to myself 'Pigs, Richard!' and I never said a wiser line in my bright young life."

"It sure did bring down the birdies roosting highest," admitted Betty. "It was pigs and Uncle Homer which captured the Van Alostines, and anyone who has them to bank on in our colony has a strong backing. Also, I notice," added Betty, who was a thrifty soul, withal, "that pigs pay."

"Pay like a high-priced soprano," declared Dick. "Just the same, too. The more money you put into pigs the more you take out—just like getting big houses at the opera by only playing up the fact that your soprano costs more than any other. I've written to Uncle Homer to join us at the colony and help me put the finishing touches on the pig ranch. And another reason: Karl has had some cor-

respondence with Mr. Van about a professorship in a college in which that cuneiform son-in-law of the Vans was a professor before he married out of the job. Karl has made a hit with the managers of the college, with Van and with Van's son-in-law by doping out the cipher on those old-time bricks they are digging up in the deserted villages of the cradle of civilization, as Karl calls it. Now, we want to do all we can to push Karl's luck. See?"

"Dear old Karl!" exclaimed Betty. "I'll find out from Mrs. Van the name of the leading man of that college and we will have him down for a week end. Karl must appear after this as your secretary, so that we can show him up in the spot-light if it appears a good thing to do when we have the college chap on hand."

But beyond these practical worldly reasons for an early return to the colony was another more important.

Frank Hardee made up his mind at the psychological moment that he had lacked heart,

and once convinced of that fact, he became the boldest of lovers, and won Genie with a rush. He was much surprised to learn that his mother had considered the match as good as made months before; and, although he had a reasonably good opinion of himself, he was also surprised that Genie's papa and mamma consented to the engagement with only a few motherly tears from Betty and a little serious advice from Dick. Having won heaven by no very desperate assault, Frank none the less valued the chief angel he found there. So, besides the less romantic reasons affecting Betty and Dick, it was because the town afforded the young people altogether too little opportunity to enjoy each other's company that the Courtneys and Hardees were among the first of the colonists to return to their country places.

When the Van Alostines returned they were even more than usually cordial. Neither Betty nor Dick ever intimated to them what they knew of the circumstances under which Her-

bert Delancy left the country; but they sometimes suspected that Karl cautiously assured the Vans that Delancy would never return. Van Alostine continued to submit strange inscriptions to Karl to decipher, and they had interviews regarding them, walking slowly up and down the Courtneys' lawn; and sometimes at these meetings Van displayed a kind and degree of interest which, to Betty's mind, could not be aroused by the mysteries or beauties of Babylonian cuneiform.

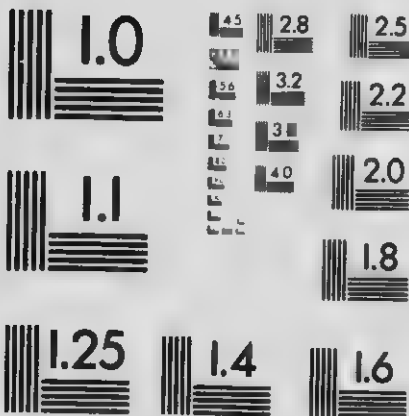
And in the course of these interviews the matter of Karl's delivering a series of lectures, as a preliminary to his appointment to a chair in a Western college, made satisfactory progress. The distinguished president of that college, visiting New York, was entertained at a week end party by the Courtneys, when the final arrangements for Karl's probation work were made.

Betty made mental preparation for this visit. For several evenings she and Richard held rehearsals, as she called them, when Karl



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gave them points for use in conversation with the dignified scholar Betty had referred to as the "leading man." Karl's pupils were apt, trained to receive cues and enthusiastic, and the net result of that part of Betty's campaign in Karl's behalf was that she firmly impressed the college president that in meeting Mrs. Richard Courtney he had met one of the most intellectual women of the century. Betty had all her catch lines pat, and if now and then she showed a disposition to misplace them a quick cipher hint from Karl put her right. It was the president, of course, who did by far the most of the talking, but he was so skillfully "fed" by Betty that he carried away the impression that he had profited most by listening to the brilliant hostess.

Karl was a fellow-guest at the table. The president had not been told by Mr. Van Alostine that Karl had been the Courtneys' steward. Mr. Van thought it was just as well not to mention the fact. Dick had told the Vans all that they needed to know of Karl,

personally, to justify Mr. Van in recommending him to the college; and as to his scholarly equipment, that was for the president to determine. That his determination was influenced favorably by the devices of Betty, is only to say that besides being a scholar, the president was a man.

Karl, shortly after that week end, received his formal invitation to deliver his course of lectures, and Betty agreed that if he remained as a professor, she and Dick would go West in the spring to visit him. "And," she added, "Frank and Genie will be taking their wedding journey at about that time and perhaps we can arrange our tours so as to make a family visit of it. Honest, dear old Karl, all I want to see to make me perfectly happy is you doing the 'learned professor stunt' and people around you who recognize that when it comes to the intellectual turn you have old Mr. Intellectual, himself, played off the boards."

Karl smiled indulgently, kissed Betty's

hand with old-time grace and went out into his new life.

Now, the three directing spirits of the colony were Mrs. Lansing, Mrs. Hardee, and Mrs. Van Alostine, and before the summer passed it was plain, even to a casual observer, that if Betty Courtney were more intimate with any of the colonists than others it was with those three women. She shared their confidences, and gradually began to share their responsibilities,—those many small, but in effect, mighty and important plans that direct and conduct the affairs of such a community. Men know nothing of such things; even some women know little. They accept the routine or innovations of their lives all as a matter of course, never pausing to think that there must be a planning and directing power behind this social routine, these innovations.

Betty's active, resourceful brain was on fire with it all. She cautiously felt each step of her advance, knew what it meant, studied the next

step, pondered, submitted to the test of her native wit the meaning of each social phenomenon, its bearing, effect, significance, and applied her conclusions to her next step.

"Mrs. Courtney is really a great help to us," remarked Mrs. Van one day after a meeting of the four, when Betty had gone. (Betty knew when there was something to be gained by being the first to depart.)

"Yes," assented Mrs. Lansing, "and the best thing about her is that she's an aristocrat. Now, I'm right on to her little affectations! She pretends that her roving life has run off the sharp angles of her conventionalities. You listen to your Aunt Lansing! That is all her little pose. She's more of a conservative than any of the rest of us.

"Jack was down at the steamer seeing some people off," continued Mrs. Lansing, referring to her husband, "and he saw Count Seristori, who was suddenly called home, you remember, by some important family affairs. Jack says the little fellow was full of praise

for the Courtneys, and confessed that he had been desperately in love with Genie. He told Jack that as he couldn't win Genie, he would not try to marry any American girl. Well, what I started out to tell you was, that the Count told Jack that the Courtneys in Europe were received by all sorts of swells, and were greatly admired friends of his father. That just shows you that Betty Courtney is having her little joke when she tells us that she and her husband lived a very bohemian life over there.

"And I know, my dear," concluded Mrs. Lansing, directing this remark particularly to Mrs. Hardee, "that of course you made your own inquiries before you consented to Frank engaging himself to Virginia—one must do that sort of thing when one has not known the young lady's people since before the Flood."

"Naturally," assented Mrs. Hardee, "we made proper inquiry. Mr. Hardee wrote to the Halls, who introduced the Courtneys here—and Mr. Hall was their banker, you may

remember—and he answered in the nicest manner possible, covering the whole situation, as men say, that if he had a daughter he would not hesitate to let her marry Paul Courtney, or let his son marry a daughter of the Courtneys. One couldn't say more, you know. As to the Courtney fortune, any of our husbands know that they not only have a large one, but that it is increasing faster than any other in the colony."

"That is all true," said Mrs. Van Alostine, "and there is another thing about Mrs. Courtney which I like, and which certainly proves that they are *nice*. I don't mean as to family, because we all made sure as to that when they first came, and found out from the Courtney-Smiths that there was no doubt as to their being the real Courtneys, but I mean as to their—why, what do you say?—being right at heart. They never *pretend* to be anything. All the social climbers we have ever had to turn down have been the most awful pretenders in the world. My husband noticed that at

once; and then their action as to that strange creature, Karl, was so simple. Just as soon as they could show that he was a gentleman and a scholar they did so, and entertained him—*entertained* him, my dears,—as an equal. Mr. Van was most struck with that. He said to me that that proved more to him than anything else. If they were not genuine, not really aristocratic, they would never have dared to do such a thing.”

Mrs. Van paused, sighed, and then continued as one who had decided after a struggle to speak of one thing more, although it had a painful relation:

“ Besides all that, Mr. Van has a letter from Herbert Delancy. He is quite ill in Paris, and wrote to my husband about some—some business they had. He made a settlement of it through that same man, Karl. It appears that before Herbert went last to Paris he discovered that Karl was not really a servant—you understand—and left some affairs in Karl’s hands. It seems that they have become

very friendly, and it was Karl who arranged Herbert's affairs so that he—so that—well, this has nothing to do with the Courtneys—but there was some money misunderstanding between Mr. Van and Herbert, and Karl cleared it all up. Herbert in his letters spoke so beautifully of the Courtneys. Poor fellow, he has not always acted just as we should have liked, but he is quite ill, and—but I know he was always a keen judge of character, and, as I was saying, he spoke so beautifully of the Courtneys."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Lansing, and "Exactly," said Mrs. Hardee, which did not seem to be quite a response to what Mrs. Van Alostine had said, yet was satisfactory. That may have been because a *non sequitur* is the most conclusive conclusion to the mind feminine. Sometimes.

It would be interesting to examine into the particulars of those transactions which resulted in Delancy's placing his affairs in Karl's hands, so that Karl paid Delancy's debts to

Mr. Van Alostine. But the only person who could have explained the matter seemed indisposed to do so. When Richard asked Karl about this one day, Karl replied, "Richard, you know as much as I do, as much as anyone can know. I can speculate on Delancy's motives—and so can you. That is all."

"But," said Dick, "why should you have undertaken so much for a man like that, for one who tried to wrong us?"

"I was under obligation to do so!"

"Under obligation to him!"

"You know the circumstances of his leaving this country after his misbehavior; that I—I influenced him."

"You hypnotized him," replied Dick, shortly.

"We call it that," said Karl quietly, "because we have no other word for it. Well, I hypnotized him. In the mental state in which I was able to place him I imposed upon him certain suggestions; made him, when he saw that he must have some one concerned

with his worldly affairs, select me as that person. Was I not, then, under some obligation to do as he asked—as I had influenced him to ask?”

Dick shook his head and pondered. “That is out of my line, Karl,” he said at last. “I can only juggle with physical things—I’m not hep with the unseen. You are, I know. It’s a woozy game, altogether. I am not even an amateur in it. You are an adept.”

“That is the patter of the mystery, ‘adept.’ I am not an adept, I know no one who is. I can command some minds, emotions, whatever, to some extent. I cannot tell how I do it, I cannot always be certain as to the effect I produce; I can only observe results and marvel at them. But you see what I mean as to being under obligation to respond to Delancy’s call for help. I had made him make that call; would it have been fair not to heed?”

“No use puzzling our poor cocos about it,” said Dick, after a thoughtful pause. “It beats anything in my old line of mystery, and

I only get uncomfortable when I try to dope it out in any manner which seems natural."

"Surely, Richard," replied Karl, with a faint smile, "for it is supernatural."

"Let's cut it out, then," Dick said, "and get down to real things: why in the name of the source of the Nile did Delancy leave the remnants of his fortune to you?"

"The unfortunate fellow could not help dying as he had lived—wayward," replied Karl. "He sent me his legal authority to arrange his affairs. I called in the help of Elizabeth's Uncle Homer—a practical man—and he took the scattered assets, possessions and accounts and realized upon them. He not only cleared Delancy of debts, but saved what you call a remnant. Delancy may have enjoyed the humor of making a will when he found that the time had come for him to do so if he ever were to, and it was natural for such a man to make his will in the favor of the man who, as he thought, had rescued his affairs so that he had anything to will."

"That is you?" asked Dick.

"He seemed so to consider me," Karl said.

"And even there he may have been influenced by the suggestions I had imposed upon him. Also, he may have known or believed that I would do exactly what I am to do: turn over what I have inherited to Elizabeth's protégée—Delancy's widow. It was not much for him, but it will be much for her."

"I suppose," said Betty, when she heard of Delancy's death and the will, "that the poor fellow was insane."

"Why insane?" asked Dick. "It was the first decent thing I ever heard of his doing, that recognition of Karl's services. That was not insanity, but decency, and even his decency was brought about by hypnotism."

"Oh, I don't mean that at all!" declared Betty. "I mean that Delancy must have been insane to have acted in a way to make him—well, don't you understand? He was born into this life, but he deliberately sacrificed it. Was not that insanity?"

Dick looked at his wife for almost a minute before he replied. As he looked his own expression changed from one of puzzlement to a quizzical smile. Possibly this change was wrought by something he saw in her eyes, some faint suggestion that for once she was not altogether serious in her remarks about the worth of social position; at least a suggestion that she would not be offended if Dick opposed her views.

"It may be, Sweetmeats," he said, "that only those are insane who do not consider this life one long scream of success. Maybe. But on the level, old girl, don't you sometimes think that these people, their amusements, their limited line of talk—Say, do you remember the Cassidays?"

"The acrobatic team—family?"

"The same. Do you remember that time out West somewhere when their girl, the lightweight, married the singing comedian who was dated along the circuit with us for several weeks?"

"Nice chap, that," assented Betty. "He's broken into Broadway comic opera, I see by the papers."

"That's the crowd. Well, we were the only supper guests, you remember, and expected to get to the hay in an hour after the happy event. We stayed until sun-up and would have been there yet, I guess, except that the whole bunch of us, including the happy, happy bride and groom, had to appear for afternoon performance. I never spent a more joyous night in my life."

Betty smiled in remembrance. "Old man Cassidy and his wife—what a pair of shoulders she had! Didn't look more than thirty on the stage doing her strong-woman act—were more fun than any comedy I've ever seen. What wit those Irish have when they're happy!"

Dick was only smiling inwardly, now. He made a sudden shift in the talk.

"What was the name of that little place we used to bicycle to—took a boat up the

Seine, got off somewhere near a towpath, rode a few miles, came to a river—the Marne?—and then to a tree with an old bell hanging to it; rang bell, boatman came and fetched us across the river to comic little restaurant. Remember?”

“Sure!” exclaimed Betty. “That was the Restaurant l’Ecu d’Or. Remember the day we went to lunch there and the queer little sleight-of-hand man was entertaining the wedding party and you helped him, and they all nearly fell dead at your stunts?”

“That certainly was great!” exclaimed Dick. “And that was where I picked up Louis Dubois, who was my dresser and our assistant for years.”

“Poor Louis!” said Betty. “And then the wedding party insisted on our joining their *déjeuner à la fourchette*. What a happy lot of children they were! And witty, at that. But what is reminding you of such days?”

“Oh, nothing,” answered Dick. “Nothing at all. I was just thinking of my pigs, and

how much more company we used to have in those old days—jolly, simple, wholesome, witty, human company. More so than the pigs, I mean.”

Betty stared at her husband for a moment, frightened, then broke out into a hearty laugh. “Poor old man!” she exclaimed, “was he longing for some of the old bohemian days? Well, after all, why should we not treat ourselves—when Genie is all safely married, and Paul is back in college? It would be ripping jolly.”

“Sort of a relief,” sighed Dick.

“You are not getting stale on this life?” asked Betty, with sudden alarm.

“Finest thing ever met rolling along the pike,” Dick replied. “I was only remarking that there are others.”

“There are. Now let me tell you something I don’t suppose you can understand because you are only a man: Mrs. Courtney-Smith rode over yesterday, and, my dear, she hadn’t been in the shack five minutes before I saw

that she chased over here for no other reason than to coddle me out of invitations to Genie's wedding reception for some of the very swell-est Fair Harbor set. Some of that set have been presented at Court, yet they are scheming to get tickets to Betty Courtney's party—show! A few years ago any of them could have seen me doing my stunt at a vaudeville show, general admission fifty cents, best seats one dollar. I said to myself, 'Elizabeth,' I said, 'you have stopped climbing, if such as these are around after passes to your show. You are sitting comfortably right on top of the sacred wall, and can kick the ladder down if you want to.' Well, Dick, that was what I said to myself."

"Good lines," remarked Dick. "What next?"

"Well, here is the wonder of it: instead of feeling that thrill of triumph, that swelled head of the 'got there,' it just made me sick! That's honest! Talk about your *l'Ecu d'Or*!

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"I SAID TO MYSELF 'ELIZABETH, YOU HAVE STOPPED CLIMBING.'"

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If Genie was all married, we'd start for the Marne to-morrow."

"Whoopee!" shouted Dick. "You are just the same old girl you always were—the best girl in the world for me!"

CHAPTER XIX

WHILE social affairs among the colonists were not permitted to enter largely into the society columns of the newspapers, custom had made it good form, or, at least, accepted it as the inevitable, that so important an affair as a wedding or a formal and large ball, should be discreetly reported. Betty had observed her name and Dick's mentioned "among those present" upon such occasions and it must be confessed that she felt some little thrills of pride thereat. Still, she complacently fell in with the rule which custom had made, and had politely declined when as politely requested by a certain young newspaper woman, who seemed alone to be in the colony's confidence in such matters, to make any report of her own social affairs.

But it was deemed proper, she discovered,

after a discussion of the subject with Mrs. Lansing, that some account of the wedding of Genie and Frank should be arranged for.

"As a matter of fact, my dear," said Mrs. Jack, "there are fifteen or twenty of us who will give descriptions of our toilets to this young woman, and, of course, we must say something about the wedding itself or we won't have a peg to hang our frocks upon, so to say."

"Naturally, I am quite averse from any newspaper publicity," replied Betty demurely.

"But I agree with you that upon an occasion of this kind something must be said, and the point is just how am I to make sure that it is said in a way that won't be offensive?"

Mrs. Lansing smiled reassuringly. "Oh, that is always very easily arranged," she remarked. "The young woman I have spoken to you of is really a very nice girl, and she makes, I am told, almost fabulous sums of money because she is able to report for the

nice papers exclusive affairs which they can get the particulars of only through her."

"Ah, I see," said Betty, who really was beginning to learn what she wanted to know from Mrs. Lansing's smile, rather than from what she said. "One does not depend, then, upon even so discreet a young woman as you speak of, entirely?"

"Not entirely," answered Mrs. Lansing. "As a matter of fact, one writes the account oneself. Then one feels certain that it is accurate."

"And satisfactory," murmured Betty.

There followed several meetings between the newspaper woman and Betty, in which certain insistence upon points Betty was beginning to take new views of, got rather upon her nerves. She was developing notions of independence, almost of rebellion against restrictions of conventions which arranged all things about her. She was naturally a bird of freedom, so to say, and her captivity was beginning to tell upon her spirits. It had been self-imposed captiv-

ity, to be sure; she had struggled to gain entrance to her cage, and only after she had accomplished even more than she had tried to do, did she realize that she had entered a cage; that she was surrounded by bars.

Now, curiously, it was Uncle Homer who, excepting Dick, first discovered signs of this rebellious spirit, this first longing for a return to freedom, and, perhaps more curious yet, at least more curious to Betty, it was Uncle Homer who first sounded a warning note.

"Betty," he said to her, "your folks, and that means my folks, held their heads mighty high among the great folks in the land before the War of the Revolution, and it does my old heart good to see one of my kin back into the place in society where she belongs. It takes money, all this does, I know, and that is the reason I have made provision that Virginia shall have as much as Frank Hardee. That will leave you and Richard free to keep along in the place you have established for yourself here."

"Yes," assented Betty with thoughtful eyes. "A good position in society is a necessity for the happiness of a girl—a woman—like Genie, who has never had any liberty such as I have had, and would not know what to do with it if she had it. But I think, Uncle, that after the wedding Dick and I will travel a bit, get away from all these restrictions—conventionalities—and stir up our minds a little."

"Not for long, I hope," said Uncle Homer, anxiously. "You are needed here by your friends, those who have the affairs of the colony in charge. The fact that you have traveled as you have, met more kinds of people than the others here, mixed about a bit in the world, is valuable to you here. You can help them—your friends—keep out what they call climbers. Eh, dear?"

"Climbers?" repeated Betty, smiling a little. "Yes, I ought to be able to spot anyone trying to butt—I mean climb—into our set. But, Uncle, are you so sure that all climbers

are undesirable? They might be nice people who have some unselfish reason for wanting such a position as I have here. They might have children to place. I tell you, Uncle, some of those climbers might be better company than some of those already at the top."

"No, my child," replied Uncle Homer. "You may have seen more of the world than I have, but I am older, have studied society more—as an outsider, a looker on, if you please—and I know that people should keep in their proper places. No climbers for us, child."

"Oh," said Betty, smiling more openly now, "I have known people outside the charmed circle of exclusive society who were quite as bright as any inside. They seem to have more interests, more things to talk about, know more about paintings and painters, music and musicians, queer or picturesque places and people, odd tours and bright tourists, acting and actor people, funny stories and storytellers, than these people here. They seemed

to know that the opera is more than going to the opera, and were not altogether content to talk the whole day long about servants and novels."

"Betty!" said Uncle Homer, almost sadly, "those people you speak of can be little better than—than Bohemians!"

"Maybe so," admitted Betty. "Dick is going to the farm this morning to see the new pigs."

"Is he?" asked Uncle Homer eagerly. "Then I must call for Mr. Van Alostine, for I promised to take him out to see them as soon as they arrived."

"Give them my regards," said Betty.

"The Van Alostines?"

"No, the pigs—they are so independent."

When Richard returned from the visit to the farm, replete with pig-lore and pork prices, he saw that Betty had discovered something in his absence she was wildly eager to impart to him. Paul and Virginia and a party of the colony young people were having a wedding

rehearsal out of which they were making a vast deal of fun and not a little noise, so Betty, declaring that the nonsense was distracting, easily made an excuse to take her husband for a walk on the grounds.

"Well, what is it?" Dick asked when they were far enough from the house to admit of confidences.

"Have you read any of the notices of this week's bill at the Coliseum?"

"Read nothing for a year except the produce market reports," replied Dick rather sadly. "Uncle Homer stands me up for an examination on the tendencies of sides and hams, and I have to be up in the part or disappoint the good man."

Betty passed to her husband a newspaper and placing a finger on a column of amusement notices said smilingly, "Read that."

Dick read: "The best feature of the new bill at the Coliseum is the work of the couple calling themselves 'Monsieur and Madame de Courtell.' This couple's work is even more

interesting than excellent. Those in the audience who like this sort of entertainment saw at once that the couple besides imitating their names were slavish imitators of the brilliant Courvatels who retired from the stage ten years or so ago and returned to France. The imitation is more exact in the byplay and business than in the actual execution of their tricks. Old theatre-goers will recall how almost exquisite the Courvatels were in that part of their work which we may call acting. One is led to suspect that the real Courvatels in their prosperous retirement in France have drilled these people in their business and byplay, but withheld the secret of their wonderful trickery."

"Now, who can these people be?" Betty asked when Dick had finished reading.

"I haven't a ghost of an idea," Dick answered. "But this writer is on to the game: if they have our business someone trained them in it, and the only living men who could have done that are Karl, and Louis Dubois.

Karl didn't, of course, and so Louis must have."

"But I thought Louis had gone to the demnition bow-wows," Betty remarked.

"Absinthe," Dick replied, "but he may have brace^d. Karl has heard of him doing his own little box of tricks in cheap Paris cafés and suburban inns. I'm going to take a peek at these people."

"So am I," responded Betty.

And, so it turned out, Virginia and Paul would, too. The next day Frank Hardee had to be away from the colony, and Genie was eager for some plan to pass the impossibly long day, and Paul never wanted an excuse to see a vaudeville show.

So on that next day father, mother, son and daughter lunched in town and then turned their steps toward the Coliseum. The side street by which they approached Broadway led past the stage door of the theatre, and as they were strolling by the door a shabbily dressed, pale little Frenchman stepped nervously from

the curb line, stood directly in the path of the Courtneys, raised his hat and said with a Frenchman's sharp attack on the consonants, "Ah, Monsieur et Madame Courvatel! Je vous souhaite le bonjour."

Betty stopped with a shock of her whole body as if she had been walking in the dark and had encountered a wall. Paul, walking by her side, felt his mother tremble, and he instinctively placed an arm about her waist. Betty reached out a trembling hand and drew Genie back to her.

After a second or two of silence Dick shrugged his shoulders, then spoke, "Ah, Louis Dubois, I suspect that you have been drilling some people in our old business. If you needed the money as badly as all that you should have sent to me for it."

The man began to reply rapidly, in French.

"Speak English," Dick commanded. "These young people are our children, and I want them to understand."

Paul felt his mother's body calm, looked at

her and saw that she, after a long sigh, which was not one of dismay, was looking at his father approvingly.

"I did teach them," the man said, speaking English haltingly, "but only when they had promised never to show in this country. They got good offers, they came here, made good, dismissed me. I am in want—hungry. Pardon me."

Dick gave the man some money and also gave him his card—Richard Courtney's card with the colony address. "You may send to me if you need more—and are sober," Dick said.

Then as the man was yet thanking him, Dick turned to Betty, tight lipped but smiling, and said, as the party walked toward the theatre entrance, "That is an old valet of mine; dressed me when I was a sleight-of-hand performer. I know the story will interest you children, but I was not going to tell you quite yet. However, this is as good a time as any. We can talk in our box."

Genie, who had watched the scene between the two men with widening eyes, now gasped, then turned impulsively and placed an arm around her mother's waist, and without another word they went inside to their box. And not a word was spoken by any of them during several numbers of the programme, though Paul, who was now smiling gleefully, looked as if he had a remark working in his mind. He was, finally, the first to speak. "Do you know, dad," he said, "ever since you showed me how to curve a baseball I have been wondering where you learned the trick. No baseball pitcher can do anything like that. Fine! Wasn't I clever?"

Betty's knitted brows showed that she had been pondering deeply. Now her brow cleared quickly and she turned with a smile to Genie, "And were you not as clever as Paul? Did you never guess, dear?"

"Not that you had been an actress," replied Genie. "But I was not so stupid as not to feel that you must have had a lot of training and experience beyond what most women have

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to be so much more clever—brilliant!—than any other woman I ever saw in my life.”

That was all that was said on the subject until the Courtneys had returned home and gone through the motions of dining. Then Genie said, “I’ll telephone to Frank not to come over this evening, because we must have only a family party while we talk of the Courvatels.”

It was Betty who told the story: not sparing much, though some of the troublous days in India were somewhat sketchily filled in. Children brought up as hers had been could not understand all of those events.

She told of her studies in Paris, learning to be a teacher of music; of the hardships suffered even while the small allowance came regularly, of the greater hardships when the allowance ceased; of Dick, her childhood lover, finding her and marrying her though she protested. “But it was no use to protest, for he had come to Paris to find and marry me, and would not listen to reason.”

Genie and Paul sat motionless, breathless

with intense interest; Dick followed the story almost as if he knew no more about it than the children, only that now and then he looked at Genie and Paul, and then smiled happily.

"We were very successful when we came to this country, and a few years before it was time for Paul to go to college and you, Genie, to leave school, we retired from the stage in order to establish a home for you."

Her voice had been steady, quiet, as she talked, but when she finished it was with a little sob, and when Genie flew to her, kissing her and laughing and petting her, Betty cried frankly.

"I've got a new mixture I'd like to have your opinion of, dad," said Paul. "Let's go into the smoking-room."

In half an hour Betty joined the men, saying that Genie had gone to her room to write a letter to Frank Hardee.

"If Frank Hardee funks," said Paul, stoutly, "he'll have to settle with me. But he won't," he added after a thoughtful pause.

"I'm a member of all his college societies, and he was a corking right tackle."

Genie came presently, and showed her letter to her mother; a pretty, girlish letter in which she told simply enough what she thought Frank should know, and added that if the disclosure made any difference in his wish as to the marriage she would release him.

A servant took the letter to the Hardee cottage, and Dick suggested that the next thing to do was to have supper, as none of them had eaten a mouthful of dinner. They were passing through the hall, a little later, to the dining-room when, without a ring at the bell, Frank Hardee rushed in at the front door, took Genie in his arms, kissed her, and then said, "That was the first mean thought you ever had about me—that this could make any difference. I left the letter for my father and mother to read. Shouldn't wonder if they came trailing over here soon."

CHAPTER XX

THE Hardees did not "come trailing" that night, but they called the next day, and Dick and Betty were surprised to find how little there was to explain. Indeed, Mrs. Hardee seemed to think that the only comment required to show that the subject was in her mind was to remark upon the "sweetness" of "dear Genie's" letter.

The Lansings and Van Alostines called soon after the Hardees, making it plain that they accepted the Courtneys for what they had proved themselves to be in the colony, and in spite of what they may have been as the Courvatels. Jack Lansing took the whole matter as the one romance of real life he had ever encountered and was vastly pleased with the whole situation. Mr. and Mrs. Van showed heroic purpose to understand, but it was plain that they simply could not. Mr. Van had lodged in his mind somehow the belief that

Dick's former profession was related to a popular demonstration of physical science, and that somehow, also, Karl, an undoubted scientist and scholar, had exploited the Courtneys on the stage in an earnest attempt to popularize the study of physics. Mrs. Van was merely dazed beyond any hope of arriving at an understanding. To her the Courtneys were a lady and a gentleman. A lady and a gentleman could do no wrong, so whatever was this strange thing the Courtneys had done it had not been unladylike or ungentlemanly, or they could not have done it.

This reasoning of Mrs. Van's did much good. She was proud of it and distributed it freely throughout the colony. While few followed or adopted it, many saw that there was much suggested by it which favored the Courtneys. Whatever they might have done could be overlooked because all that they had done as colonists was perfection as such. There was the point Mrs. Van's logic brought forward.

Though preparation for the wedding went on there were many in the colony who had not called since the disclosure.

These, the more numerous members of the colony, Betty and Dick knew were sitting in judgment. But Betty and Dick, knowing this, were surprised to find how calmly they awaited the verdict.

"It will make no earthly difference," Betty said, "what the final judgment is. Frank Hardee will be Genie's husband. That establishes her, safely and beyond attack. Paul needs no help from us socially, thank heaven. He will have an income and he already has college friends. That is all a man needs. Oh, when the wedding bells have rung won't we just go rampaging around this old globe looking for the Bohemians of all nations!"

"From Peru to Petaluma," assented Dick. "As to the verdict, I guess the Lansings are taking a hand in that. It makes no difference, anyway. The main proposition is that I feel so much better now that 'all is known.' I

wonder I didn't spoil the plot by blurting it all out before we had got half in."

"Oh, we thought it was so much more wonderful inside than we find it to be that our great stunt then seemed to be to conceal our former life," Betty commented. "If we had not we could not have climbed as we did, and that is our excuse. The children need the result of our work. We do not, and lucky for us that we do not—for it may slip away from us. It's an even toss now, if the verdict is in our favor, that neither of us will take much colony life in ours after this. Good folk, to be sure, but taking Mrs. Lansing out of the cast there is not a soul left here who has the beginning of a notion of wit or entertaining ways. It is just what it is—society. It doesn't go with a scream when you know it well, if you ever knew anything else well."

It was only the day after this talk that Mrs. Lansing stopped her auto-car at the Courtneys' long enough to say to Betty that there was to be rather a crowd at the clubhouse the

next day, and wouldn't Betty and her husband make a point of being there.

The Courtneys understood. In some way Mrs. Lansing and a few others of the Courtneys' partisans had planned to bring pretty nearly all of the colony together at the club, and there the verdict was to be determined.

"Naturally," remarked Betty to Dick, "Mrs. Jack would not ask us to be there unless she was satisfied with the layout. We'll go. Do you remember the first time we drove over there? It was my first case of real stage fright. I thought then that these simple souls were something sublime, majestic. I took them at the estimate of those who do not know. It is the only way the world manages to get along at all, I guess. If everyone knew exactly what everyone else was worth on the level, worth on the inside, I mean, what a salad this world would be! There is your trap standing outside. Come."

"Hadn't we better make a sort of scenario of our parts, old girl? What will we do in the

way of business when we make our entrance?" asked Dick, who was practical.

"L nothing," replied Betty. "Of course there will be nothing formal done to let us know how we stand. That is not the way we— they, I mean—conduct things in polite society. We'll know all that we are to know without anyone speaking a line."

Once more Dick made the none too wide entrance to the clubhouse grounds with a skillful sweep of the trap, and brought up at the landing platform with precise rein work. Betty moved down the long veranda first, bowing pleasantly to acquaintances, speaking to friends, and proceeding slowly and easily toward a group where her partisans were gathered. The first thing she felt was that she was the least embarrassed woman there. That was good to the soul of Betty Courtney! She remembered how she felt when she first stood on that veranda: as if she were in the presence of superior beings, suppliant at a throne, an almost anguished aspirant for recognition.

"It will be stupid here this afternoon," she was now saying to herself, "among these dull people, but the little play we are in will entertain for a while."

She joined her particular group and settled herself in a comfortable chair. "What's doing?" she asked, after thinking that she would say, "What is the afternoon program."

"Bridge for the women," replied Mrs. Jack. "Will you play?"

"I wouldn't mind sitting in for a little while," she said.

Women were gathering around in a friendly manner, one after another making it plain that they were there to let the Courtneys know that everything was to be as it had been, and nothing said about "disclosures."

Betty found herself nettled by this attitude. She did not want suppression of the Courvatel subject. Seeing Dick the center of a group of men, and knowing that he was telling stories to which they were all eager listeners, she called out, "Oh, Dick!"

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He turned attentively, and then Betty adjusted her voice, looked about smilingly, and said so all there must hear, "Monsieur Courvattel, we women are to play bridge. You take the men to the billiard-room and show them that trick with the billiard ball and cues you failed on the first time we were ever here. Obey me, M'sieur Courvattel."

"I'm the grandest little obeyer you ever met," Dick responded. "But don't you blame me for missing that trick before. I missed it purposely, for a time, because I was not then prepared to let the spectators know what a distinguished chap I am—or, rather, what a distinguished professional I had been."

That little play between husband and wife cleared away the last trace of ambiguity in the situation. The Courtneys left the clubhouse a couple of hours later as fully accepted colonists as they had ever been.

Soon Betty heard the wedding bells ring; saw Frank and Genie drive away, their handsome faces looking back at her; saw the look

in her daughter's eyes which every mother must be happy to see, the look of blissful security.

Then it became known that the Courtneys would soon start for Europe; not for the beaten paths of the old country, but those byways they knew so well, where vagrants from convention dwell in happy freedom.

Mrs. Jack was so fond of thinking what the Courtneys would see and what do and how do it, that she even philosophized upon the event.

"It seems to me like this," she said to Mrs. Hardee. "Betty Courtney, as well born as any of us, has tasted freedom, and freedom has made her wise."

"You read that in some book, dear," said Mrs. Hardee.

"I did not. I am saying something I have thought out all by myself. Now, as I was saying, Mrs. Courtney needs to have these excursions into those strange lands of strange people—her beloved Bohemia—in order to be

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kept clever, and young and entertaining. We would not know how to benefit by such things, so we are better off at home. But we will benefit through her. She'll come back brighter than ever and we will profit by it."

"That is all true enough, Mrs. Jack," replied Mrs. Hardee, "but I know perfectly well that you read something like that in a book, and applied it to our romance."

"I suppose we'll be chasing back here soon—some day, anyway," remarked Betty to Dick, watching the tall buildings of Manhattan readjust their relative positions as their steamer made the curve at the lower end of the island to straighten out into her course for the Narrows.

"I suppose so," Dick responded. "It's a good thing—society. A good thing to get away from."

"And to have a place in, and now and then to return to," Betty said thoughtfully. "I'm glad we are to see some of the old lanes of odd

life once more; I am glad that we are——Bjove, Dick! I forgot to ask Mrs Jack Lansing what she is to wear at the Mannings dinner and concert!”

“We might hit the wireless for a bulletin from home,” suggested Dick.

“I suppose,” said Betty, slowly, “that it is our special good fortune not only to be free but to be able to enjoy freedom. I guess it is good for me—a woman—to want to know what Mrs. Jack is going to wear to the concert; it is good for both of us that we want to know what are the latest songs and stories in the Latin Quarter. I guess, mostly, people who break out into freedom are happier in their cages. I know we shall enjoy liberty, and I know we shall both enjoy the cage again—after a trip to Bohemia.”

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